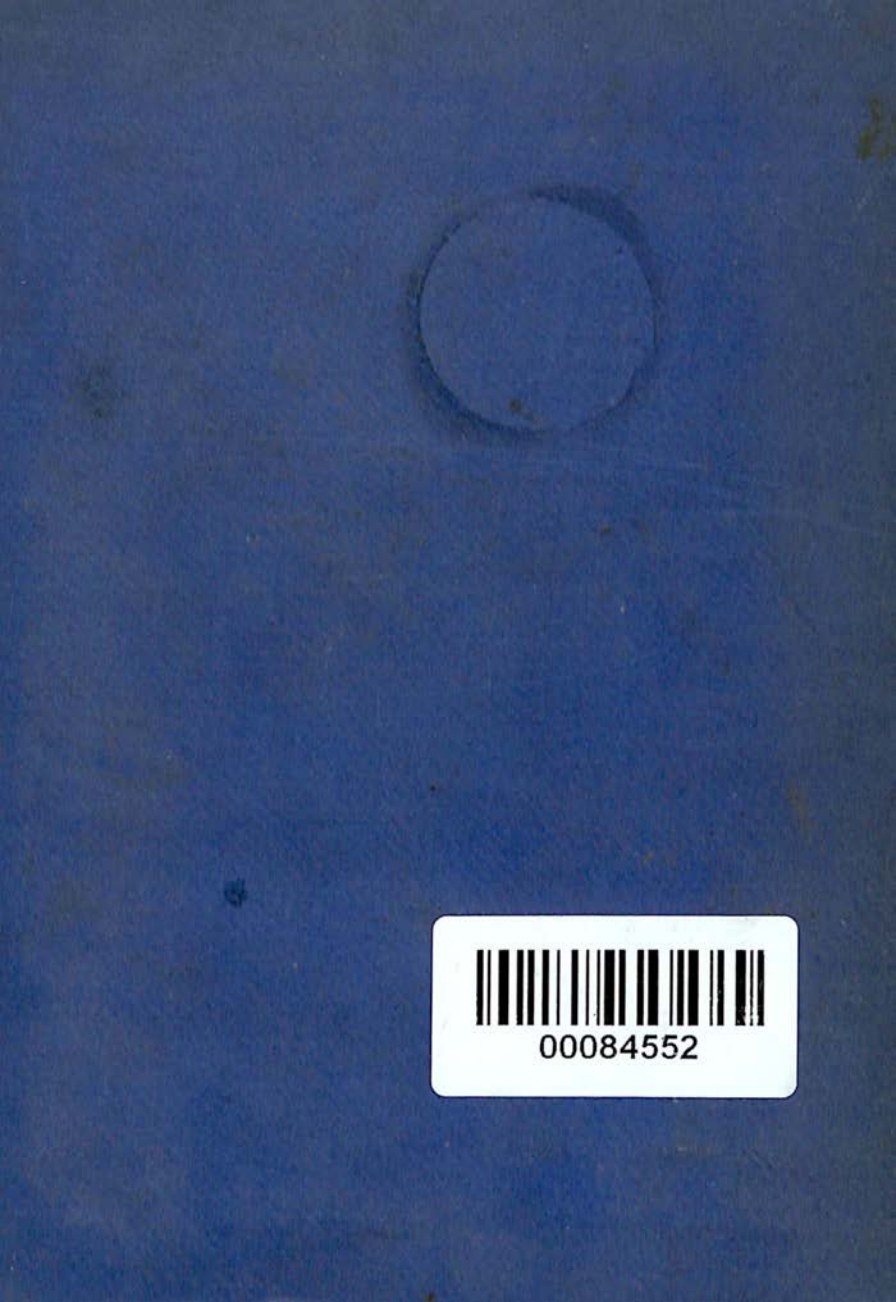
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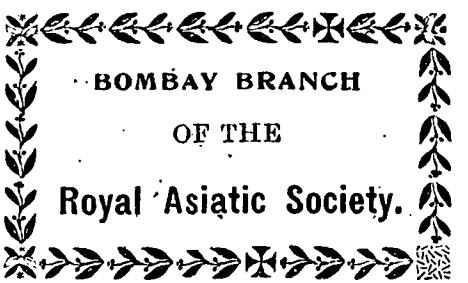

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A SUMMER IN NORMANDY

With my Children

BY

MRS. CHARLES ELLIS

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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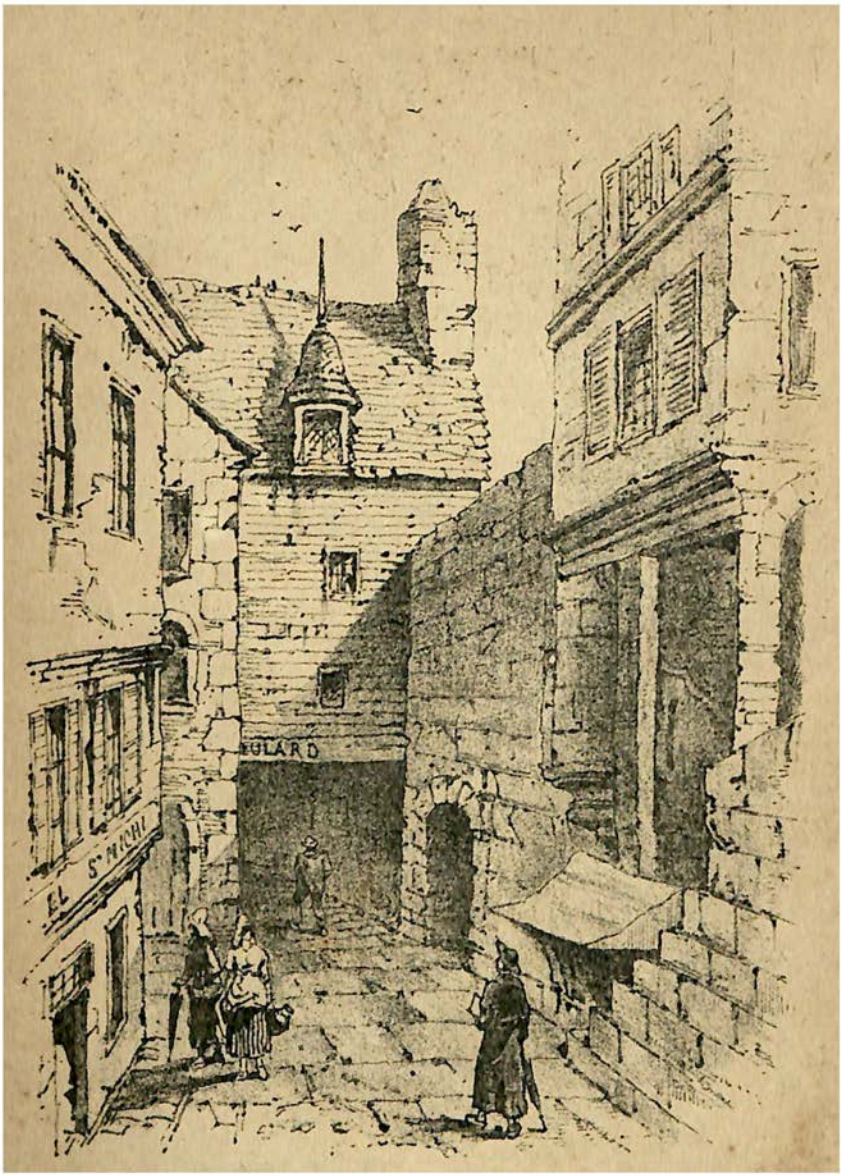
ULARD
EL S. MICHI

PREFACE.

THIS little work was written soon after the war of 1870, and originally intended for publication in a child's magazine.

I now dedicate it to my children, M. P. E., H. E., L. E., and F. A. G. E.

La Luquette, Hyères (Var),
France.
6th May, 1878.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

THE THAMES VILLAGE — RIVER EXPEDITIONS— GOING ABROAD — THE JOURNEY TO SOUTHAMPTON 1

CHAPTER II.

ARRIVAL AT ST. MALO — DOL — THE DILIGENCE— THE JOURNEY'S END 24

CHAPTER III.

A LITTLE TOWN IN NORMANDY — HOTEL LIFE— MAISON BOSQUET 40

CHAPTER IV.

COLD WEATHER — NANON AND HER FARM — BATOU, THE DOG — HOW THE CHILDREN'S DINNER RAN INTO THE WOODS 64

CHAPTER V.

Page

THE VALLEY FARM—THE VACHON FAMILY—DONKEY RIDES—BIRDS—THE GOLDEN ORIOLES—HAY-MAKING 81

CHAPTER VI.

A "COLLATION"—SUMMER WEATHER—FLOWERS—THE FÊTE DIEU—CHÂTEAU MONTGOMERI . 103

CHAPTER VII.

POLITICAL EVENTS—THE WAR—DEPARTURE OF FRANÇOIS 123

CHAPTER VIII.

MONT ST. MICHEL 137

CHAPTER IX.

PICNIC AT THORN FERRY—PROCLAMATION OF THE REPUBLIC—FAREWELL TO MAISON BOSQUET . 159

CHAPTER X.

JOURNEY TO ST. LO AND CHERBOURG—THE HOME IN SCOTLAND 178

L'ENVOI 193

A SUMMER IN NORMANDY.

CHAPTER I.

THE THAMES VILLAGE—RIVER EXPEDITIONS—GOING ABROAD—THE JOURNEY TO SOUTHAMPTON.

THIS will be the story of six months in the life of four children.

I will not tell you their names, but, as they all had different coloured eyes—though in other respects very much alike—we will distinguish them by the names of Blue Eyes, Brown Eyes, Black Eyes, and Grey Eyes.

Grey Eyes, the youngest, was a small boy

of two years old, and the rest were all girls. In character they very much resembled most other children of my acquaintance; they were fond of play, of amusement, of their own way, and of many other things, but not fond of lessons, or of doing anything that gave them the least trouble.

Their mother taught them; and, among other things, she was especially anxious they should learn French; but this they found very difficult, and consequently used to grumble and growl about it, and the poor "*Petit Precepteur*," out of which they used to learn, and with which, I dare say, many of you children are well acquainted, was treated very badly: his poor leaves were all dog-eared, and

some were actually thumbed away as if they had been eaten up—and, in spite of all this, they knew very little of his inside. They were very sorry for this afterwards, as you shall hear.

At this time, these children were living in a country village near the Thames. They thought their old brown house there very pleasant, with the attic windows of their nursery opening on the roof, from which they could see the cedars and the apple-trees in the neighbour's garden across the road, and could even, by stretching their necks a little, catch sight of the swinging sign in front of the village alehouse, which once had a fine picture of St. George and the Dragon; but the

picture and the saint are fast disappearing, and the alehouse generally goes by the name of the "Dragon" alone.

The straggling village street runs down to the river-side, where there is a ferry; and in summer the landing-place is a pretty sight, with its little fleet of freshly-varnished canoes and gay green-and-white wherries waiting to be hired—the wherries with such fine names: "The Rose of the Village," "The Lady Emily," or "The May Fly"—and Tommy, the tame swan, ruffling in and out amongst them.

The inn by the water-side is smarter than the old "Dragon," and has a tea-house overhanging the river, where the people sit and smoke and play billiards in the long summer

evenings, when the little village is all alive with visitors, anglers, and boatmen, and looks and sounds like a hive of bees.

This was the season when the children liked the place best, for then began all the expeditions up and down the river. The shortest expedition was to Hampton Court, which was really so close that they could see it plainly across, from the low water meadows where they went to gather cowslips, lying sunny and sleepy-looking, with its red brick towers and stiff gardens, on the other side of the river; but to go to there they had to cross the ferry, which was a very long business if the old ferryman happened to be on the wrong side, as he was very deaf,

and particularly so if he saw any one else coming in the distance who might possibly want to cross also!

Once over, and on the towing-path, it was a pleasant walk along the bank, where they were sure to find every flower that loves warmth and shelter, nestling under the low brick wall enclosing the Home Park; real sweet violets in the spring, and in summer the blue bugloss, the hound's-tongue, with its lurid red flower, the pretty little ivy-leaved toadflax, and tall purple-headed teazles.

The children generally on these occasions took care to provide themselves with plenty of bread in their pockets for the bloated gold-fish in the fountain at the Palace—those ex-

traordinary fish who actually seem to thrive on all the unwholesome variety of food so liberally bestowed on them, and who, even after the Easter and Whitsun holidays, when they have been fed all day long by a succession of visitors, seem able to swim about as usual!

A longer trip was going down the river to Teddington, which was quite a day's journey, going past the waterworks and the old town of Kingston—past all the trim villas, each with its little boat moored at the foot of its very neat garden, adorned with every variety of stucco flower-pot and statue, and the never-failing weeping willows dipping into the water—on to the lock where the tide ends, and

which, getting out of order once, allowed the tide to come up even as far as the children's village, much to the astonishment of the boat-man colony there, who found their boats all high and dry one morning.

I think Brown Eyes preferred these rather cockney voyages to any other, as going *up* the river involved going through the locks, which frightened her very much: she did not know which was worst—the sinking gradually down till you had the green, dank, dripping walls high above your head; or the rising, with the water pouring down so close to you as if bent on swamping the boat.

The voyages to Sunbury and Walton were only to be achieved by starting early on one

of the longest days, and were full of adventure and peril. Two locks to be passed, two bridges to shoot; but then what treasures of flowers to be found along the way! the purple loosestrife fringing all the banks, the pink-flowering rush, and creamy meadow-sweet; the water-lilies, the large yellow villarsia, looking rather like a miniature water-lily, the spotted red and yellow balsam, discovered by Blue Eyes in a damp ditch near Sunbury Lock; not to speak of forget-me-nots, every tuft of which looked bluer and better than those they had already picked.

There was one spot which had always a fearful interest for the children, just at the long flat reach of river above Hampton race-

course, where, in the autumn, was to be seen a tent, and a shoal of little brown half-naked children, popping in and out of the shallow water.

These belonged to gipsies who encamped here to get employment as fruit-pickers in the large orchard close by. I think our children rather envied these little sunburnt creatures their wild life, with nothing to do but to watch the sleepy old barges being towed along, no undressing at night, with stupid buttons and tapes always getting into knots, merely having to creep under their flapping tent, and with no lessons to learn.

I am sorry to say that these long expeditions were not always unmixed pleasure, as

the latter part of the way home, the sun had set, the river was in deep shadow, the pollard willows on the bank looking black against the sky; there was no excitement, except the jump of some wakeful fish, or the sight of a sleepy swan startled by the passing of the boat from her cool resting-place on some reedy eyot; the children were generally tired, and something else besides, which children occasionally are after a long day's amusement, and their mother had to sit among all the wet water-weeds and flowers which they had gathered, and then to collect them out of the boat and to carry them, as well as to drag one or more tired-out children up through the dusty little village with its twinkling lights;

and there were many wise resolves made at that time, that "Really, my dear, we must never take these little things so far again." But somehow these good resolves were only made to be broken through on the very next occasion.

A time came at length, however, when they had to leave this place with all its pleasures, and it was decided that they were to go abroad.

The children were much pleased at the idea, for they all liked change, and would have desired nothing better than to set off at once, but it was not so easy for their father and mother to find quickly a place to suit in every way. Recommendations poured in on every

side. One person came and said one place was so healthy, so cheap, and that there were such good masters to be had there; but then another person, equally wise, came and said exactly the opposite—that it was not healthy, and very dear, and with very inferior masters, till one wondered how they could have lived in the same place and yet come to such different conclusions.

These discussions were very wearisome to the children: they grew quite tired of the sight of the "Tourist's Guide," with the red cover, which their mother was continually studying, and were rejoiced when the matter was finally decided, and they were actually shown on the map the town in Normandy to

which they were to go, and the way they were to get to it: in a steamer from Southampton to St. Malo, then in a railway to where it ended in a round black dot, and from thence by *diligence*, or coach, a very long way, for, astonishing to say, there was no railway nearer than thirty miles.

They were a little surprised to hear their father say it would take at least two or even three days to get there, when Black Eyes could even cover the whole distance with her little finger, but did not think they should mind even a longer journey.

And now the day of departure had come, a bright, clear April day; they had been up since six o'clock, and very busy indeed, pack-

ing up all the useless things they wanted to take, and which their nurse would keep throwing out of the boxes as fast as they put them in; they had put on their travelling bags, given by an aunt for the journey, and had stuffed them till they were ready to burst; Black Eyes happened to possess two bags, and put them both on, consequently she was very tired long before they set off; they were full of business; there was Tigress, the cat, to say good bye to, besides the two green parrots,—but these last, being old bachelors, much given to biting, and very much averse to children, there was not much sorrow on that score, and the adieux were very respectful.

They had also to go through the village to take leave of all their friends and acquaintances: there was the poor old bedridden woman whom they had been used to go and see every Sunday, and whose cottage had always been very amusing to them, for her fireplace was all made of coloured tiles, with pictures on them: Cain killing Abel, Balaam and his ass, and many other familiar portraits; and then her sanded kitchen had such funny things hung all round its walls! there was a brass warming-pan, so bright you could see your face in it, and an old painted Dutch clock.

She cried when they came in, and said she might never see them again, which made

them feel uncomfortable, so that they were not sorry to get away; they did not mind so much bidding good bye to the butcher, for he took the parting in a much more jovial manner, though on the whole, perhaps, they were a greater loss to him than to the old woman.

They were a long time with the postmistress, who, with her sister and niece, kept the village shop, where you could buy writing-paper, and gowns and ribbons, and many elegant trifles highly appreciated by the children, who used there to spend their few pennies on valentines (sentimental valentines, not vulgar ones) and scent-bottles of lavender water. From this attractive resort they had

at last to be torn away for their dinner, as they were to go by the train in the afternoon, so as to reach Southampton in time to sail by the steamer in the evening.

There was still an aunt or two and a few cousins to part with, but the children did not mind that, for children always expect to see every one again when they wake up in the morning, and it is only when grown up that one learns that, having once said good bye, many mornings may dawn upon one without bringing the faces one longs to see.

But all these disagreeables being over, the caravan slowly moved off for the railway station, the cab full of children, parcels, bags, and umbrellas; everybody well tired out

before they had even begun their journey, as must be the case if people will thus begin at the wrong end of the day.

In the train the children looking out of the window were pleased to recognize, as they whisked past, all the places they knew which were within a walk of their old home: the rushy common with the geese so feared in times past, the little pond on which they had been sliding last winter, and the cottage where their mother's old nurse lived (euphoniously termed Rose Cottage). Could it be only two days since they had had tea and mixed biscuits there with her? It seemed more like two years to them, now that they were fairly off on their travels.

I don't think they took much notice of the country after that, for it soon grew dusk, and it was nearly dark when they arrived at Southampton; of course they found the wind blowing a little, though it had been quite a calm still day everywhere else, for if you have ever read the old Breton fairy tale of Lord Wind and Lady Rain, you will know that they came over from France to live in England, and I am pretty sure that Lord Wind has got lodgings in Southampton, so as to be always ready to begin blowing at the ships the instant they stir out of the harbour.

Our children had to leave the railway now, and to walk down to the docks, and as they threaded their way in and out, clutching tight

hold of their protectors, it seemed to them as if they had never imagined there could be so many ships in the world.

At last, among the forest of masts, they came to a fine large steamer, looking like a long house on the water. But alas! it was not for them! It was the Peninsular and Oriental steamer for India. Theirs was the next, for St. Malo, and very like the pictures usually given of the boat in which Julius Cæsar invaded England, except that he had oars instead of a smoky chimney.

However, they were glad enough to get into it, such as it was, and to go downstairs, and have some tea at the long table, with the swinging lamp above, and after that to be

undressed and packed in layers into a tiny cabin, where they had very much the appearance of a box of sardines.

There were already there a family of English children returning to France: they had with them a French *bonne*, who wore a white cap instead of a bonnet, and to whom they chattered French in a way which astonished our children.

They were fast asleep by the time the steamer set off, all except Blue Eyes, who had a window or port-hole in her berth, out of which she saw the rocks at the Isle of Wight, called the Needles, looking very white and strange in the moonlight, and she fell asleep wondering why they were called Needles,

when there certainly never could have been a giant big enough to thread them, and what thick rope he would want for thread, very like the rope she had seen fastening the ships in the docks!

CHAPTER II.

ARRIVAL AT ST. MALO—DOL—THE DILIGENCE—THE JOURNEY'S END.

THEY were wakened next morning by the sound of a bell, which the stewardess told them was the fog-bell, and she further reassured them by telling them about a steamer which had been run down and lost, only a month before, in just such another thick fog, in the same spot. This gloomy story made them feel rather frightened, and so they were very glad when at last the fog cleared off, and they were able to see the

French coast, and the sea studded with hundreds of little rocks.

It had changed to a glorious bright sunny day by the time they arrived at the harbour of St. Malo, and as they neared the pier, how strange it all seemed to them! the crowd of women with tall white caps of every shape, green-coated *douaniers* or Custom House men, and soldiers with blue coats and loose red trousers, exactly like those in Grey Eyes' last box of toys, and every one, even the little children, gabbling French!

On the pier is the large gate of the town, which is surrounded by high walls, and which I hardly think Anne of Brittany herself would find much altered if she could see it. It is

said to have been her favourite town, and I don't wonder at it, for it is most picturesque, with its high houses, narrow streets, its fish market, and the women sitting spinning at their doors, the only drawback being the various and strong smells. In old days I don't think they minded that, and it is the only drawback there: you can really *feel* the smell, as they say in Scotland.

The fog had delayed them so long, prolonging their ten hours into sixteen, that they had missed the train, and were obliged to remain at the hotel at St. Malo till the next day, which gave the children great delight, for they had the afternoon to spend on the white sand outside the town, gathering the

shells, and had a walk round on the top of the wall, looking right down on the houses and streets, before coming back to their hotel. The entrance to their hotel was through a narrow passage, which led into a paved court-yard, surrounded on all sides by very high, narrow, and old-fashioned houses. Nevertheless, it had a very bright, cheerful look. On one side were the glass doors of the dining-room, on the other was a trellis covered with creeping plants, upon which hung cages with birds chirping and singing; there were pots of flowers and evergreens, and tables and chairs for people to sit and drink their coffee. The wide French windows above were full of life and bustle; at each storey

you could see white-capped women busy ironing, cooking, or hanging out bright-coloured clothes to dry on the cords stretched across from house to house, and all the inhabitants above and below were shrieking and chattering at the tops of their voices. The childrens' bed-room was high up, commanding an excellent view into the interiors of five families opposite, and it was furnished as they thought quite magnificently, with velvet-cushioned chairs, besides having a polished floor, a looking-glass over the chimney, gaudy China jars, and an alabaster clock which did not go.

Their evening supper was quite an amusement to the good-natured *bonne*, who opened

her bright eyes at the quantity of milk and bread consumed by these little English children; and as to their evening bath, she evidently thought it very wonderful that so much water was required, when they did not look so very dirty after all.

Happily for children, they can generally sleep, however new and strange the place may be; and the beds being very comfortable, as French beds are, even in the commonest inns, they were only awakened next morning by the bustle of travellers departing for the early train. They were not to start till the middle of the day, so after their early breakfast, the children came down into the courtyard, and amused themselves by watching the

preparations for the ten o'clock breakfast at the *table d'hote* in the dining-room. The table was laid as if for dinner, but without a tablecloth. There were dishes of fruit, nosegays of flowers, heaped-up baskets of queerly-shaped rolls, tall glass jugs of cider, and bottles of wine, some of them with napkins twisted round their necks.

Presently a loud bell began clanging outside, and there came in, besides the people who were staying in the hotel, others evidently living in the town, most of them elderly men, who seemed to be in the habit of dining and breakfasting here every day. They sat down opposite the bottles of wine, untwisted the napkins, tucked them under their chins, and

set to work. One was an old officer in a faded blue and gold uniform. He had a very bronzed face, and a wiry grey moustache and hair, cropped quite close to his head. He and another man argued and talked very loud all the time, and they all drank wine together, with many bows and great politeness while waiting for the various courses.

The dishes came across the yard from a kind of arched recess, leading down, I suppose, to the kitchen, but it looked as if they were producing it out of the earth, like Rumpelstilskin's cooks. The number and variety of dishes quite astonished the children: they saw beef, chicken, fish, cheese, omelette, cutlets, vegetables, and a peculiarly good-looking

sweet open tart, which made them feel quite hungry. They were supposed to be amusing themselves with the French "Illustrated News," put for the entertainment of strangers, but much preferred watching the progress of the feast, and the eager backs of the eaters, through the glass doors.

At twelve o'clock the omnibus came up to take them away to the railway station, where they were all crowded into a carriage with three or four good-natured priests, who told them the names of the places as they passed them. The country near St. Malo is very like England, well cultivated and wooded, with little pebbly streams, and pretty orchards and farms; instead of the men you see hold-

ing the red flags at the railway crossings at home, there were here women, dressed in short red petticoats, blue jackets, and flat hats, with trumpets as well as flags.

Less than an hour in the railway brought them to the curious old town of Dol, where they were to commence their *diligence* journey into Normandy.

Having some time to wait before it started, they were to dine at the inn called "La Grande Maison," but why so called no one could tell, as it could hardly have been smaller. It looked out on the market-place, and lower down there was a round stone fountain brimming over with clear water. The shops had most of them beautifully

carved stone arches, from which hung the pots and pans and different wares.

Hitherto the children had had their interpreters always ready at their elbows to ask for all they wanted; but here it was that they began to see it would have been better for them if they had learnt more French, for the dinner came up while their father and mother were away looking at the cathedral, and they found it very embarrassing not to be able to make themselves understood. Blue Eyes tried her utmost to remember the dinned page of "*Le Petit Precepteur*," so scorned formerly, with its "*Donnez moi*," "*de la viande*," "*Du poulet*," "*du pain*," &c.; and she had to speak for the whole party.

The bustle and packing of the *diligence* amused them extremely; but, once in it, they were so uncomfortable, that they thought if all travelling were like it, they would really have preferred to remain at home,—and I think their relations were of the same opinion. Luckily their only fellow-travellers were some kind English people, with whom they had made acquaintance at St. Malo, and they were most good-natured to the children—taking them on their laps, drawing pictures for them, and telling them stories: I am sure they must still have a very vivid remembrance of the day's journey. The *diligence* was crammed inside till it was too full; it was overloaded outside till it was top-heavy. It was drawn

by only two horses, and though there was a magnificent and solemn promise of a third horse to be found somewhere on the road, he never appeared.

There was also a terrible alarm at one time that a certain black trunk, containing all the children's clothes and carefully packed for immediate use on arrival, had been left behind at the Custom House at St. Malo. It was eventually discovered and disgorged next day from the capacious maw of the *diligence;* but the alarm added to the general depression of spirits.

The day was hot, the road was dusty, the latter part of it dull and uninteresting, the only things they noticed being the long two-

wheeled carts loaded with grey sand, and drawn by sturdy white horses, who also looked very hot in their high blue sheepskin collars.

At length towards evening the hill came in sight, on which was built the little town for which they were bound; and at the foot, when the horses began to crawl slowly up, the children were allowed to get out and run, and even had time to pick some of the primroses which starred the banks.

At the top of the hill they could look back at the straight white road by which they had come—stretching away in the far distance, the borders of tall poplar-trees now casting slanting shadows in the spring sunset. Brown Eyes could not think why they called the road

"*Route Imperiale*," for it was not at all her idea of an Emperor's road.

On their right, far away in the west, they could see the sea, or what looked like the sea, and a high rock rising out of it, with a castle and buildings on it. This, they were told, was Mont St. Michel. It seemed quite familiar to them when they heard it was the place where William the Conqueror's younger son Henry was besieged by his brother Robert. They had read about it in "Little Arthur's History of England."

In many of the villages they had passed they had noticed large bunches of mistletoe hung over the doors as a sign that cider was sold inside; but now when they had got

into the *diligence* again, and came close to the town, nearly every second house had its bunch, showing how thirsty people were expected to be after their long drive. Instead of gas lamps, there were a few clumsy-looking oil lanterns slung on a rope across the streets. Having reached the main street, they rumbled and rattled over the pavement, and finally were unpacked, limp with fatigue, in the courtyard of the "Hotel de la Poste." They did not stay here, however, having engaged rooms at another hotel where all the English go, and where they were to find a landlord who actually spoke English—and here I will leave them for the present.

CHAPTER III.

A LITTLE TOWN IN NORMANDY—HOTEL LIFE—MAISON BOSQUET.

NOW, having brought the children safely here, I must describe the town to you, in order that you may have some idea of the place where they are going to live. I will not tell you its name, but I dare say you will easily recognize it if you ever happen to go there. It is built on a very high hill—the only hill in that part of the country—and from it you can see so far in every direction around, that it really seems as if the whole

of Normandy and Brittany lay stretched out before you.

The town is neat and compact, with one very good street and many narrow ones. It has two or three churches, a museum, very tolerable shops, a fine *Prefecture*, or house where the *Sous-Prefet* lives, a public garden laid out with avenues of lime-trees, and decorated with a large statue of General Valhubert, a native of the town, who was killed in one of the First Napoleon's battles. On this side there are very picturesque old walls ending in a well-preserved tower, now used by the one upholsterer of the town as a furniture store.

The large *Place*, or market-place, looks very

gay in the mornings, with all the peasant women sitting under the shade of their enormous scarlet or blue umbrellas. In the fruit-time it is very pretty, when they have their stalls laid out with bunches of flowers, cherries, peaches, apricots, purple and green figs, and every variety of purple, green, and yellow plum.

The *poissardes*, or fish-women, have one side of the market quite to themselves, and mostly come from Granville, on the coast. Some of them are well-known characters, and rather a terror to quiet folk. The weekly market is most amusing; for then there are stalls of every conceivable ware—*sabots*, pottery, tubs, stockings, clothes, furniture, and

jewellery—and here the country people buy everything they want.

Some little way from the market-place there is the *Jardin des Plantes*, or Botanical Garden, whence you look down almost straight on the bed of the river below, which flows round the town—a narrow stream winding through a sandy plain, or a sea, according as the tide is in or out.

From here you see also not only Mont. St. Michel, but a smaller rock nearer the coast, called "La Tombèléne:" its name supposed to be derived from "La tombe de la belle Hélène," but what beautiful Helen was buried there I never heard.

Looking into the Botanical Garden is the

convent and school, where all the French and many of the English children are taught, and there is also the old empty barracks, in one of the rooms of which is held the English service. This room is a very good size, with windows on each side, and is called "Le Temple" by the French people. The English clergyman lives in a pretty villa some way off.

Then towards the outskirts come the *boulevards*—broad streets with rows of trees and modern houses, where most of the English families live, who formed (or used to form) quite a little colony. After the *boulevards* come a few villas, and it was the last of these—beyond even the *octroi* post, where the tax is paid on all provisions coming from the

country, and so far from the actual town as to be considered quite a *campagne*, or country house—which so delighted the father and mother of our children by its beautiful situation on the brow of the hill surrounded by woods, that they overlooked the scanty and dilapidated furniture, the mouldy garret-like appearance of most of the rooms, and the inconvenient distance from church, education, and marketing, and determined at once to find out its owner, and to try and hire it from him.

He lived in a dull house in one of the narrowest streets in the town, which seemed extraordinary, being the possessor of this earthly Paradise; but, as he explained, this was

necessary for the proper performance of his various duties, he being a public functionary. In fact, the house had been vacant for so many years, that he was evidently rejoiced to get it off his hands, and proposed conveying Madame there on the spot in his little carriage, which was just coming round, so as to arrange all preliminaries before having the lease drawn out. Madame accordingly mounted into an exceedingly high and rattling conveyance, driven by François, M. Lemaître's butler, coachman, farm servant, and steward all in one. He was dressed in a blouse and straw hat, and sat on the front seat, but edgeways, so as to be able to join in the conversation, and advise as to where the strangers

were to order their firewood, and the best person for cutting it up, the grocer they ought to employ, and their tradesmen in general.

On arriving at the iron gate on which hung the board with the welcome inscription, "*Maïson a louer,*" they stopped and summoned Nanon, the old woman with the keys, from the farmhouse close by. That farm was a very good specimen of those you see all over Normandy. The cow-house, with grey shingled roof and massive stone arch, the cottage with many-coloured thatch, and the apricot-trees trained on the walls, the pigeon-house and the bronzed pigeons sunning themselves on the top; a draw-well with mossy bucket; a large fig-tree overhanging the gate;

and the dog chained in a corner. Nanon, in close cap, no hair to be seen, short blue petticoat, and bare legs and *sabots*, led them through the orchard, now in full beauty, with apple-trees all in blow, to the house, which I shall call Maison Bosquet.

It stood on a kind of natural terrace, palisaded out of the wood on the side of the hill. It was whitewashed, of course, and had bright green Venetian blinds, a gable in front, and a small bell-tower on top. A little lawn in front was skirted by a walk which led round through a rocky copse, and by a thatched orangery, with irises growing out of the thatch, as you often see them hereabouts. It was at that season of the year when one

warm showery day will make everything burst forth into leaf and grow before your very eyes, and from here you could see over miles of wooded country, now dressed in every shade of tender green.

How sunny and bright it all looked—the blossoming orchards, the two rivers winding in and out, and the silver line of sea in the distance; all so quiet and still that you could hear the tinkling of the little church bell, and the singing of the nightingale in the valley beneath.

M. Lemaître now proceeded to display the house and rooms and shabby old furniture to the greatest advantage: whenever there seemed any disposition on the part of his

would-be tenants to complain of anything, he rushed to the window, and begged Madame to look at the view! There really was, however, sufficient room in the house, a very fair kitchen, a good coach-house and stable, which would do for storing wood, a chicken-yard and hen-coop, and a very pretty enclosed garden behind, full of weeds and rose-trees, and divided from M. Lemaître's own farm garden by a high hornbeam hedge, with a draw-well common to both. At the garden door was a large mossy stone, with a coat of arms carved on it.

M. Lemaître, in settling about his lease, which was about a yard long when it appeared, said he must reserve the right of

exploitation, which puzzled the strangers, as they, thinking it meant the produce of the lawn and pleasure ground in front, wondered he did not use the shorter word, *hay;* but afterwards they found that he meant also the cones from the fir-trees, the flowers from the limes, the chestnuts, and any stray stick or branch lying about.

There were beautiful large fir-trees on the lawn, which are not at all common here, and the story goes that they were planted originally by a Scotchman, who had a lease of this place from its Norman possessor, and that he asked and obtained leave to cut down an orchard and plant firs instead. But on the Scotchman leaving, the Norman demanded

the value of all the apple-trees, saying the others were only "*arbres de luxe.*" This story may be true, but I doubt its being true of a Scotchman, as it is not at all like their cautious character. The present landlord was by no means so sharp, for though he asked rather a high rent, yet he gave no trouble afterwards, and was always obliging and civil.

The house being taken, there remained a few other arrangements to make: the children's own little portable beds were to come from England, the bedsteads in the house being few and bad; others were hired from Mme. Lenoir, the upholsterer, who lets and furnishes most of the houses here; she also

supplied the thick white unbreakable china (so suited for children), and all the necessary array of pots, pans, dishes, and cans included in that comprehensive French word, *La vaisselle.*

She enlarged much on the virtues of a certain article warranted to supply the whole family with hot water, and which she said was especially suited to English people; she called it *un grand tic avec un robinet*, or cock. It must originally, I fancy, have been on a stand like an urn; indeed, it resembled an urn in size and shape, but it seemed a very poor substitute for a good kitchen kettle, and tormented the household for many a day, for it would never arrange itself on the logs; it

had to be lifted off to get water from its cock, and it had a habit of dribbling besides.

The oven, or *four de campagne*, was, however, a charming contrivance, being merely an iron basin which you put over a trivet, and heaped the ashes round, and it baked very well.

The things which could not be hired were now bought; two maids were found, just disengaged, in consequence of some English going away; provisions laid in from butcher, baker, and two grocers, one for English things and one for French things. Washerwomen were easily to be had, as half the population of the town are of that trade: there were three who all insisted on their right to

be employed, one because she had an English mangle, another because she washed for the hotel, and the third because she had been the person to tell Madame about the Maison Bosquet, and had shown the way there. At the time they had attributed her attentions to the well-known politeness of foreigners, and were disappointed at finding she had ulterior designs on their linen.

All this time the children were at the hotel, and were getting a little tired of the life there, though at first they had liked it. There was a garden behind full of evergreens and beds of camellias in blow; here they could play, and occasionally had the society of Antoine, the landlord's son, a pale little boy in a tartan

suit, and when he was away at school they had his swing, which was hung between two attenuated trees.

They did not breakfast or dine at the regular *table d'hote*, but had their bread and milk breakfast sometimes in a green lattice-work pagoda in the garden, or in their own room, and they dined at one o'clock in the amusing dining-room opening right out into the main street, from whence Grey Eyes made many attempts to rush out into the gutter. His meat-soup dinner rather shocked Marie, the pretty *bonne*, who volunteered to prepare for him a *bouillon*, or bread-and-water soup, as eaten by French *bébés*. But to this he strenuously objected, like a true-born

Briton, much prefering the gravy-soup made by the hotel cook. Grey Eyes did not much care for Marie, possibly from this her failure in cookery, and liked better Hélène, the housemaid, with a moustache, and not so favoured by nature, who sang loud songs to him, and hoisted him up in the air with vigorous *houppelas!* but the prime favourite with all was Auguste, the Boots, but a very great personage in the establishment, who did a little of every kind of work, but who always seemed to have more time to himself than the maids. The children delighted to watch him with brushes strapped on his feet dancing on the waxed floors in the morning, and thought it such an improvement on all that tiresome

scrubbing and washing with soap and water, which used to take place on Saturday in their nursery at home, when they never could get at their toys, and were always hunted out of the room because of the damp floor.

The only excitement in their day was the progress down their street of the town crier, with a very large drum, on which he gave very fine rolls, collecting all the small boys around him. He was dressed like a soldier, and had a ferocious appearance, and proclaimed his news as if he was giving forth some imperial edict; but it generally turned out to be the announcement of a concert in the evening, or a take of fish come into the town, and similar intelligence.

The children had done no lessons all this fortnight, the only attempts in a literary way being a letter or two to cousins at home, and these under difficulties, for who does not know the drawbacks of letter writing at an hotel, with the travelling ink-bottle, which has a tendency to throw itself flat on its back, or to snap violently down on the pen?

And yet the children would have been very much surprised if you had told them that in reality they had learnt more in this fortnight than if they had had their French lesson every day. All the names of common things, of what they ate and drank, of the shops they saw, were familiar to them now. Grey Eyes, perhaps, had profited most, for having, like a

wise baby, learnt to walk before he learnt to talk, he had come abroad very little encumbered with the English language, and found little trouble in changing it.

The weather was considerate enough to remain quite fine for their move, which was made very successfully, Auguste having presided over the purchase of dancing-brushes and beeswax, the last things wanted to complete the household arrangements.

The children were charmed with their new home. Black Eyes admired particularly the drawing-room, very properly furnished, she thought, with a sofa, six chairs, a round table, a square table, and a stool,—just like a baby-house; that is to say, as they used to be

furnished, for I grieve to see that the present rage for luxury has penetrated even to the baby-houses, and the two-storey mansion with green balcony and brass knocker, familiar to us all, and which can only belong to dolls of a moderate income, must now have its pianoforte, its moderator lamp, and other superfluities, undreamed of in old times. There were certainly no superfluities here, however, unless you call two cracked potichomanie vases, and a false clock made of tin, with no inside, by that name! The sofa and chairs were high, hard, and tightly covered with blue figured stuff; the table was topped with grey marble, and not comfortable to put your elbows on. The other rooms

had only the mere necessaries of life, and the kitchen looked bare when they remembered the kitchen at home, with its many bright covers, pots, pans, and gridirons. Here the dinner seemed to be all cooked in a frying-pan, over a handful of charcoal in a grating. Blue Eyes was pleased at having what she called a room to herself, which was really more like a passage between two other rooms; but it had a slice of a window, a shelf against the wall, and just space enough for her bed and a chair. There was a balcony to the room Grey Eyes was to occupy, which had to be netted over like an aviary for him.

Their time of idleness had now come to an end, for, among other necessaries, there had

been provided a governess, old Madame Petit Pierre, who was to come every morning at nine o'clock, and to remain three hours. She did not speak any English at all, so they were at first rather afraid of her; but in time they got to like her very much, and were quite glad when, on a holiday, she used sometimes to remain and play with them at various games. Later on they had also a music-master, M. Bémol, in tight varnished boots and yellow gloves, who appeared twice a week, always slightly irascible, from the length of the walk. He was very proud of knowing the English for flat and sharp, but poor Blue Eyes wished fervently that he had known more than that.

CHAPTER IV.

COLD WEATHER—NANON AND HER FARM—BATQU, THE DOG—HOW THE CHILDREN'S DINNER RAN INTO THE WOODS.

HAVING seen a clear blue sky continually over their heads ever since their arrival in France, the children had come to the conclusion that it never rained, and were, in consequence, wofully put out one morning, on awakening, to find the rain beating against the windows, nothing to be seen outside but fog and mist, and to feel, besides, that it was actually very cold. In fact, there came then a fortnight of bitter cold weather,

which they felt all the more, accustomed as they were to carpets and coal fires, and the close-fitting doors and windows of an English house. All the coast round this district of Normandy is very subject to sea-fogs, which come rushing in from the Atlantic, wrapping everything in a dense cold white mist, so that you cannot see an inch before your nose: it seemed to penetrate through all their bones, and even to ooze up through the floors. They all caught cold, and used to sit cowering over the wood fires, which seemed to throw out no heat at all: they did not then know the knack of making them hotter by keeping all the ashes in a bank, behind the logs. At last, in desperation, their father went off into

the town, and ordered a ton of coals, at forty francs the ton. I hardly think they would have been called coals anywhere else, having very much the look of what is called *dross* in Scotland; but even this was an improvement on wood; and there were also bought little portable grates to burn them in.

The children found this rather a dreary time, for there were of course very few books, nothing being so heavy to carry about; and they missed the well-filled bookcases, which lined the walls at their old home. There was, however, an important discovery made, of a lending library attached to the English Church, where, for a very small payment, you could get some books to read.

Children luckily do not care much whether their books are new or old, and as this library had many children's books, chiefly contributed by people leaving, who had too many to pack up, they were able, by its help, to pass away many a dull hour, more especially on a wet day.

It was very fortunate, in the end, that there was so much rain at this time, for after it came the dry hot summer of 1870, which you may remember, as it was equally so everywhere.

I need not say that this cold weather was said to be quite unusual here: in a new place that is always impressed upon one by the inhabitants; but the French people are

certainly not as chilly, and do not seem to mind the cold, as the English do.

At last the fog cleared off, the rain ceased, the sun blazed out again, the birds began to sing, and the happy children emerged from the house, looking somewhat the worse for their course of ipecacuanha wine, and cold in the head, and rather like the damp butterflies, who also reappeared, with the tips of their white wings all frayed and injured, as if they too had been caught in "*the frozen palms of spring.*"

Our children soon grew acquainted with their surroundings. Their nearest neighbour was Nanon at the farm, and though she was not very sociable, still they liked going in

there to watch her broods of dear little white chickens and her turkeys. She was especially proud of her turkeys: there were three broods of them, and her anger was extreme when one morning it was discovered that a marten had got into the hen-house and had devoured all but two. What a commotion it excited!

François, who had come down early from the town, rushed at once back to communicate the dire misfortune. Presently M. Lemaître, François, and Nanon spent the better part of an hour contemplating the probable hole where the marten was supposed to have come in, which hole was eventually blocked by a trap, constructed by the united wisdom of François and Bouteloup the town carpenter.

This trap must, however, have been slightly defective, for though the marten (evidently thinking the turkeys very good) returned next day for the rest, it only succeeded in catching his pretty black nose, which M. Lemaître triumphantly displayed as "*le museau*" of his enemy.

Besides fowls and turkeys, Nanon had the cow to take care of, and a sheep, two lambs—a white one and a black one—and a goat. The cow was a very personable Alderney. She may have had a good temper in the beginning of life, but it had been very much soured by the treatment she had received. Round her body was strapped a stout leather belt, to which her horns were fastened by a chain, so

that she might not injure the apple-trees when she happened to be tethered in the orchard.

Both cows and sheep in Normandy are generally tethered, as they say it prevents them trampling down the grass. The leather belt is an invention dating from centuries ago; nevertheless, I don't think they like it yet. The sheep certainly hated it, for instead of her being mild and amiable, as one expects a sheep to be, she was of a very furious disposition, and used to turn and face you, and stamp at you with her feet.

Grey Eyes, who spent most of his life in the orchard and farm, was rather afraid, but used to stand at a safe distance and stamp at her in return. The two lambs had their liberty

for a certain time, but when supposed to have come to years of discretion, were each invested with a belt and tied to the trunk of an apple-tree.

The black one, being of a violent, uncontrolled nature, nearly hung himself the first day by twisting his rope round the tree quite tight, but eventually he also gave in to captivity. As you may fancy, the constant moving and tethering of all these animals took up a great deal of time, and Nanon might be heard from "early morn to dewy eve" hammering away at their several pegs; but she had employments enough besides.

She baked all the long loaves of bread for the Lemaître household, in her brick oven in

the orchard; she washed all their clothes; she gathered all the sticks, all the lime-flowers, all the fir-cones, all the chestnuts, and the fruit, and made the cider. I don't think she had the management of the regular kitchen garden, as François used to work in that, and he used to do a few odd jobs about the place, but of course he was a great deal up at the town, and she had besides her own patch of garden at the back of the farm-house, where she grew the tall cow-cabbages, which are like our own cabbages, mounted up on tall stalks. These stalks are supposed to make very good walking-sticks when dried, and I have no doubt she had a supply of them drying in the rafters, so as to give M. Lemaître

a new one every week. She even gathered the dandelion and nettles out of the dry ditch where the goat was secured, whether for the turkeys, or for spinach and salad for herself, or for Batou the dog, I don't know.

Poor Batou! his *was* a dull life. He was never unchained, he had not even the run of the yard or orchard, and was fed on Nanon's leavings. He was of an uncertain breed, not quite a bull-dog, but inclining that way. His appearance was decidedly against him, and so it happened that neither the children nor their mother were inclined to be friendly with him at first. The mother, in fact, had the misfortune of being a born coward, and very much afraid of dogs, and it must be confessed

that she felt rather glad at first that he *was* tied up, and could neither bite her nor run at her. The discovery of Batou's kindly qualities (for he turned out to be good-natured and grateful), and the pleasure of his acquaintance was due to the children's Aunt L., who arrived about this time to stay with them.

She was left one Sunday morning to recover from the fatigue of her long journey of the day before, while the rest of the family had sallied off to their "*temple*" in the town, and, with Grey Eyes trotting by her side, she employed her time inspecting all the premises, and penetrated even to the farm, opening the iron gate and finding all there empty and silent, Nanon having departed for the day in

all the glory of "stockings" and her "*robe noire*," leaving all the animals shut up, Batou to be seen in his corner, looking even more dispirited than usual.

Kind L. is at once the champion and victim of all distressed miserable dogs, who instinctively follow her home, sit upon her door-step, and won't be driven away! She had even felt obliged, Samaritan-like, on leaving her English village, to go surety to the butcher for a weekly liver to be supplied to the last waif who had claimed her hospitality, and whom she has since provided with a name, a character, and a home. She was shocked at poor Batou's degraded appearance—at once decided that he was thirsty, and proceeded to

draw water for him from the well, going back also to the house to collect what she could for him to eat.

Thenceforward Batou's path of life was smoothed for him by daily portions of grease, bones, and scraps, wrested from the unwilling hands of Angélique the cook, and on Sunday he had even a double portion, though I never could see why he should require to be consoled for the absence of Nanon, his churlish overseer.

The arrival of this aunt and a cousin, to remain the whole summer, was a great delight to the children. The cousin was a little younger than Blue Eyes, but had much more experience in the ways of the world, and was

considered by all of them to be a kind of Livingstone or Columbus, having been abroad for three winters successively—once at Arcachon in France, once in Guernsey, and once even as far as Algeria in Africa! She was looked upon as an authority on all foreign matters, and it was when she came that the children took to playing in the pretty rocky part of the garden, where there was a little ravine full of trees, and a high point of rock, which they dignified by the name of a mountain, from whence they could see Mont St. Michel, and, on clear days, even distinguish the fishermen drying their nets on the sand.

Before the cousin came, the children had very much avoided all this part, most un-

accountably seeming to prefer playing in the chicken-yard or in the enclosed garden behind the house. Now they confessed to her that they really thought there might be bears or wolves here, that the ravine looked exactly like a bear's den, and that they had heard that there were wild beasts once in France. The cousin's superior knowledge soon put an end to all this, causing the chicken-yard to be deserted, and a very good thing too, as, one day, they had left the door open, which led to very disastrous consequences; for you must know that Angélique the cook used to go every Saturday to market, where she bought, according to custom, three or four fowls, whom she brought home tied together by the

legs in a most uncomfortable manner. These poor things were then put into the coop, and fed with buckwheat till required. There were two or three bars missing from the coop; consequently, one day they got out, and finding their yard door open, off they set into the wood. There was a fine hue and cry after them: the cook ran one way, the maid another way. François even was pressed into the service.

The pursuers remained away a very long time, and, of course, returned unsuccessful. One fowl came back of itself next morning, but the others were irretrievably lost, and I have no doubt have since swelled the game-bag of some seigneur in the neighbourhood.

CHAPTER V.

THE VALLEY FARM—THE VACHON FAMILY—DONKEY RIDES—BIRDS—THE GOLDEN ORIOLES—HAYMAKING.

AFTER Nanon, the nearest neighbour was the curé of the parish, who had built a tall ugly house round the corner, which he let, and he lived himself in a small house near it. He might be seen in the evenings in his broad-leaved shovel hat, walking up and down reading his Breviary, or else with the long black skirts of his coat tucked-up, weeding his flower-beds.

Passing by his house, and by a gate to

which belonged some legend or story, as it was called "*La Barrière Malheureuse*," a favourite walk led down to the nearest farm in the valley. As the crow flies it was very close, lying just below their own premises; but as the hill there was steep as a wall down into the wood, they were obliged to go a circuit round to avoid it. Part of the way was through a charming wet lane, full of primroses, violets, ferns, and graceful Solomon's seal, with its drooping green and white flowers. Except for it, and that the other flowers had longer stalks and larger blossoms than at home, you might have fancied yourself in any Surrey or Sussex lane.

The primroses were in such numbers that

the children at last hardly cared to pick them. The little French children there never pick them, for they are considered "*des fleurs fièvreuses*" and very unwholesome. This libel on them is rather fortunate, as they are thus left to blow in all their beauty close up to the town. The stream in the lane is not very polite, as it sometimes takes the whole road to itself, obliging one to clamber along by the side in some places. At the end of the lane they came out into the wood; and on washing days it was a most amusing sight, for here are the "*lavoirs*" or washing-sheds, built over the square tanks, where they dam up all the little streams which run down the hill. What a cackle and noise there was!

All the women chattering, and beating away at the clothes with their wooden battledores. I don't think it improves the look of the streams, which used to astonish one at first by their blue soapy water; but the clothes are very well washed, and smell very sweet, from being dried in the wood, and only taken back to the town to be ironed. The birds very much resented these weekly invasions, when they could hardly hear themselves sing for all the talking.

Quite at the bottom of the hill, and past the wood, lay the Vachon farm, with its large walnut-trees, saw-pit, orchards, fields, and gardens, all jumbled together. Everything had a more luxuriant look than on the hill;

the grass was knee-deep, and even in hot weather the cows looked cool and comfortable in it. Old Mère Vachon was a complete picture of what a Norman peasant ought to be: handsome well-cut features, very erect, and neatly dressed, it was a pleasure to look at her carrying her prettily-shaped brown milk pitchers. She was very pleased at Maison Bosquet being again inhabited, and providing her with ready customers for all her vegetables, fruit, milk, eggs, and butter, so that she was spared the trouble of taking it to the daily market, and had merely to collect the little remainder on Saturday, when she went to the grand affair to have her weekly gossip. She and her son and his

pretty overworked-looking wife, "*Ma bru*," as old Mère Vachon called her, all lived here together with little Jean and Marie, the grandchildren. They looked fat and rosy, though fed, curiously to our ideas, on soup and bread, and occasionally cider or sour wine. Marie wore a close little white cap, blue gown, and *sabots*, and on Sunday was dressed exactly like her grandmother, crossed handkerchief and all.

The inside of the house was rather dark, but had some fine furniture,—two very large four-post beds, crammed into alcoves, the bedding beautifully clean, but the whole affair not airy to sleep in, and suggestive of night-mare. There were two high presses, made

of polished walnut wood and clamped with brass, which held all the multifarious clothes of Mère Vachon and her "*bru*." Mère Vachon displayed her press with great pride, as having been made from the brother of the walnut-tree outside.

She also showed her stores of linen, all made from flax grown on the farm, spun by herself, and woven under her own superintendence: it seemed as if it would require an apprenticeship to be able to wear this linen when it was made, for it looked very coarse and rather like a hair shirt; but I suppose they get used to it, like the eels, and it may grow softer when washed. There were bunches of flax hanging up to dry from the rafters in the upper loft, in time, I

suppose, to be converted into little Marie's *trousseau*. Their petticoats were also home-made, spun by themselves: the daughter-in-law showed her Sunday gown of pretty red and blue striped stuff, which she had worn for ten years. It can be only in the winter that they have time to spin, for all through the summer they work too hard at field work and in the garden, and they had also many cows, sheep, pigs, and fowls to look after; and poor old Vachon used to look sometimes very weary at the end of a long day, when she came tramping up with the milk.

There is certainly a great deal to admire in the peasantry here; they are so pleasant, and civil, and agreeable, and their family affection

is so pretty to see, especially their attachment to their father and mother, for whom they will make any sacrifice; and they are so simple and thrifty, never wasting anything, but turning everything to account, so that round their dwellings you never see all the rubbish and dirt which with us so surely marks the neighbourhood of *civilization*, all the old shoes, paper, ashes, rags, and refuse! With these Normans, nothing is thrown away: their clothes are so stout and well made that they never wear out, their best leather shoes go down from mother to daughter, and *sabots*, of course, can be turned into firewood whenever they are worn out.

Passing on by the Vachon farm, you very

soon come out on the high road, by a large stone cross, and from this road many pretty but sandy lanes branch down to the river. It is fatiguing work walking in them, sinking many inches into the soft grey sand at every step. There had, however, been a lucky discovery made of a donkey and side-saddle, which was sometimes hired on these occasions for the children, as the river was rather beyond their walking powers. It was decidedly a disappointment, though, when they got there, for having always heard it talked of by every one as "*La Grève*," and hearing that people actually went down there for sea-bathing at the time of the high tides, they had got it into their heads that it was like the sea, which it

certainly is not. Nothing but samphire and bent grass grows on these low sandy shores, though the sand itself is reckoned an excellent manure, and there are always carts down there being loaded and carrying it up to the fields and gardens above. There were no pretty shells to find, only common mussels, cockles, and razor-shells, the only rarity being the curious knife-like bones of the cuttle-fish, which go by the name of *couteaux* there, perhaps the origin of our name of cuttle-fish. All along the shore there are scattered cottages and small farms, each with their patch of garden, and apple-trees and plum-trees all blown in one direction, and with a heap of fishing-nets laid to dry on the sand in front.

Another donkey expedition on a very grand scale, with three donkeys attended by a boy, was undertaken with their English friends of the *diligence*, as a farewell party before they went away on farther travels. The children enjoyed the riding very much, the only drawback being that the saddles were inclined to turn suddenly round when the donkeys trotted, so as to land Brown Eyes over on the road. The donkeys were put to graze when they arrived at the wood, which was a very pretty one, about five or six miles from the town on the land side. There was a rushy field full of orchises, and a stream, and a thicket. This day was made memorable to the children by their discovering in this

thicket the Normandy slug, which they had never seen before, much more gaily dressed than his English cousin, being a bright orange, spotted with black.

Near here was a solitary-looking château, which seemed a magnified edition of their own house, with the same whitewashed outside, green blinds, and wooden bell-tower. It had its pigeon-house and a fish-pond, and gardens round, but all had a rough, unkempt look, the grass very ragged and not shaven; and yet the inhabitants must have been people of consequence, for they used to drive into chapel in the town in a fine carriage with two horses, and a magnificent coachman in a crimson livery, with a glazed hat and gold

band. He seemed a little uneasy, however, in his gorgeous clothes, as if he had been just caught up from staking the peas in the garden, and had hardly had time to shake into his finery.

The spring was now finally departing with all its glory of primroses and bluebells, and the woods were growing rampant with all the summer tangle of vetches and wild roses, and with the spring went away their English friends.

The little town now began to spruce itself up for the reception of the few tourists who come off the beaten track, stay one night, find there is nothing to be seen except the view, and start off again with a great deal of fuss

and bustle, many waterproofs, umbrellas, and brown straw hats, to the great edification of all the shopkeepers, who gaze upon their departure with regret, feeling sure they are all rich "*milors en coton*," which they think is a real rank of English nobility.

But I must not forget to mention two very distinguished tourists indeed, who arrived with the hot weather, having come a very long way indeed; a pair of Baltimore birds, or golden orioles. They come to the wood below Maison Bosquet every summer, and look quite beautiful flying about with their bright orange and black feathers. The children were not so much surprised at seeing them as the older people were, for if you

expect to see bears and wolves in a place, you could hardly be astonished at a rare bird or two. There was a diligent but ineffectual search made for the curious hanging nest of these orioles, but they had concealed it too cleverly. I believe they are desperate thieves, and will steal any hanks of yarn or thread put out to bleach, to weave it into their nests.

I have since heard that the hoopoe, and the large butcher bird, and the Dartford warbler, all more or less rare in England, are also to be found in the neighbourhood; common birds are very numerous; a great many jays, and the green woodpecker, and kingfishers down near the river. The hot weather also brought out the glow-worms, and at night

the little ravine looked as if lighted up for a fairy's ball: they were most provoking creatures, these glow-worms, for if caught and put to shine where one could see them in the garden, they grew sulky, and went away and hid themselves in the laurels.

The garden had been put by this time into tolerable order, and planted with a few geraniums, and a kind of marguerite or herbaceous daisy, which is very common in all the gardens. A quantity of obliging balsams and ice-plants had come up of themselves, and the roses were quite beautiful, one yellow rose growing all over the wall. The roses were very much infested by a lovely green beetle, who did a great deal of damage.

The flowers now had to be watered every evening, and this is no joke if you have to get the water from a draw well; first wheeling up the bucket, then lifting it on to the side, and then having to fill your watering-pot from it, is very damp. There was always a pool of water round the well, and even the children grew tired of the work, wonderful to say. Drawing water in this way takes so long too that I wonder no one has ever thought of the ugly invention of a pump; but I don't think there is one in the whole country near there. The wells are a study in themselves: at all the cottages they are different—some with an arch, some with a hooked beam; some with cross beams. A

resident in the town had made sketches of as many as he could find, and I think there were over twenty, not two alike.

François was generally very busy also watering in his garden on the other side in the evening, and would make polite observations and conversation through the hedge and well. He was more at the farm and garden now, and very busy; and in the haytime the staff of workers was further increased by Marie d'Argonne, a stout weeding woman, and a hobbledehoy nephew of Nanon's, who seemed to have found the soft spot in her otherwise hard heart; for on his declaring in the course of the haymaking that he had a headache, and was ill, and

could not work, she led him away most tenderly to the house. His illness did not surprise Aunt L——, who had seen him through the hornbeam hedge busily employed munching all M. Lemaître's unripe gooseberries and currants in the early morning.

The haymaking proceeded beautifully, one hot day succeeding another without a drop of rain, and it only wanted one day more to finish it off, when there came on a very oppressive haze, and M. Lemaître appeared to hurry proceedings, as the barometer had fallen, and he expected a thunderstorm.

He was attired in a neat suit of grey, and a broad straw hat and black ribbon for the country, and remained there most part of the

day urging on his workers, and scratching up with his walking-stick any stray blade of hay carelessly forgotten by them. It was all gathered in by the evening, under his vigilant superintendence; and he and his tribe followed the hay-cart to the barn with quite the air of a Harvest Home, having circumvented the thunderstorm.

When it did come it was a tremendous one, and such rain as you seldom see in England; but it is a great advantage to the town, for it washes it so beautifully clean. Pot d'Etain Street, which enjoys the reputation of the dirtiest of all the streets, was hardly to be recognized the day after, as it had had four feet of water running down it

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like a mountain torrent, and its stones looked quite polished. It is, perhaps, because of the very heavy rain here, that they never stack their hay or straw, but put it away at once into their barns, so that you never see any stacks round their farms; but, of course, many more barns are required, and it gives the hay rather a musty smell.

CHAPTER VI.

A "COLLATION"—SUMMER WEATHER—FLOWERS—THE FÊTE DIEU—CHÂTEAU MONTGOMERI.

ONE of the children's birthdays happened to be in the summer, and as they had among other small acquaintances got to know two little boys, nephews to their governess, Madame Petitpierre, she and they were invited to come and drink tea and spend the afternoon, the hay being all gone, and the lawn in proper order for a "*fête champêtre*." The birthday cake was ordered from Jutrel,

the confectioner in the main street, as it was supposed to be beyond the genius of Madame Hermon the bakeress, who lived in a filthy little hole of a house in Pot d'Etain Street, though from there she used to produce excellent "*pain Anglais*" and meringues, and a certain small cake called Patience,—a very good cake for children. But Jutrel's cake was a superior affair. I think it was called a "*Madeleine glacée*," or some such name, and was ornamented with dried cherries and angelica in patterns. The sugar was most delicious, and melted in your mouth, quite unlike the hard, unyielding white sugar with pink flourishes which the children remembered on the last year's birthday cake, made by the

Kingston pastrycook, and eaten on an island on the Thames. The tea was laid under the trees on the grass; and there was a melon which nobody was allowed to eat, and figs which were then beginning to ripen.

The two little boys did not much seem to like tea or milk, which was very natural as French children are only given tea when they are ill, so that it seemed to them rather like physic; and they were much too polite to accept the wine which was offered to them instead, when they saw no one else drinking it.

After tea they had games, a sort of "hunt the slipper," which they called "*Cache cache borrico*," and "*Le furet court*," a game like

our "French blind man's buff," played with a ring on a string; and many others which our children had never heard of before.

In return for this entertainment Madame Petitpierre gave what she called a "*collation*" to the children, at her tight little house in the town, Rue Belle Etoile. It had a pocket handkerchief of garden at the back, where there was a bright green arbour with painted glass windows. Besides the little boys there were also here two neat little French girls, pupils of Madame's, dressed in very well fitting narrow-chested frocks, pretty aprons, and high boots. It was a tight fit for them all in the green arbour, where they were put to amuse themselves while the *collation* was

preparing; but the garden had not much more space, for besides her carnations and marguerites, Madame had there her little bed of salad, and a row of pot-herbs of various kinds. Our children were now luckily able to understand and to make themselves understood in French, and it was fortunate, for they went to this party quite by themselves, and nobody there understood or spoke a word of English.

At the *collation* of fruit, cakes, and wine, the two little boys had their revenge, like the fable of the Fox and the Stork, for here our children looked round in vain for their accustomed milk or tea.

How hot it grew in the middle of that

summer! so hot that they could not venture out in the middle of the day.

The house seemed heated red hot, and the doors and windows blistered and cracked with heat, and if you put your head out, it seemed like going out of the frying-pan into the fire; the very birds grew silent and retired into the shade to sleep, and you could hear nothing but the whirr of the grasshopper, and the clocketting of Nanon's *sabots* over at the farmyard; some of the wells went dry, and there was hardly water enough in the *lavoirs* to wash the clothes.

Towards evening it grew more bearable, as the breeze from the sea used then to spring up, and as soon as they heard the bells of the

little church in the valley begin to ring for the *salut* or evening prayer, and after tea, the children used to be allowed to go out and try to cool after the scorching day.

The flowers which had been in the sun looked quite faded and exhausted, but down in the wood under the trees the fern and foxglove and honeysuckles looked cool and fresh. There were no summer flowers different from what they had known in England, but that did not matter to the children, who rather enjoyed seeing all their old acquaintances as the months brought them round, for they had had the good fortune of having been brought up in the country, and so they will all through their lives find the flowers to be little cheerful

friends, coming back every spring and summer always the same, not changing their pretty little coats and fashions, as we silly mortals do, so that the daisies are still the "flowers white and red" of old Chaucer's time, and daffydowndilly still comes up to town in her yellow petticoat and her green gown, just as she did hundreds of years ago. The children always fancied that the foxgloves in the wood were finer than those that grew in their own copse, but even these were high enough to make little Grey Eyes look a mere pigmy as he stood by one of their tall spires of blossom, fitting the bells on his tiny brown fingers.

Above the wood was a field, so full of fine blue corn-flowers that you could hardly tell

what the original crop had been. These made beautiful nosegays for the drawing-room, put in those pretty pale green earthenware pots and pitchers which can be bought in the town.

One of these hot evenings they met a great many children lugging home large baskets full of ox-eye daisies, poppies, corn-flowers, and every kind of flower, to strew in the streets at the *fête Dieu* procession next day. The houses are all dressed with boughs and flowers for it, white sheets and tablecloths are hung from all the windows, and green booths of boughs and moss and leaves are put in some of the streets, in which are little altars, where the procession halts on its way. These are called "*reposoirs*." All the

priests and the sisters of charity walk in the procession, and some of the school children, dressed as angels, scatter flowers in front. I am sure they did not look half as pretty dressed as angels as they did in their little blouses and *sabots*, dragging along their heavy baskets.

At this time in the evening the sandy lanes leading to the "*Grève*" used to be full of carts, loaded with hampers of fruit, going up to the town. Brown Eyes used to like to follow in their wake, as at every jolt some of the greengages or plums were sent off into the road. It is rather a pity they pick it all before it is really ripe, but I suppose it is for fear of all the bruising it may get on its

travels. The children always asked to rest before climbing the hill home again, in Mère Vachon's orchard, where they knew very well the way to a certain pear-tree of the old sugar-and-water kind, or the fig-tree, on which the figs were beginning to turn a golden green. This fig-tree had been bespoken by the Maison Bosquet family, according to custom, as figs are always very much in request; but the purple figs are thought the best, and the trees engaged very early in the season.

The Vachon garden was a charming confusion of currants, gooseberries, vegetables, and fruit-trees; and the grapes were beginning to look very pretty. The vine was trained over the house; they all there think a great

deal of grapes and vines, even to the extent of making "*beignets*" or fritters of the young shoots and leaves, but the grapes are generally very sour.

The Vachon family were still at work, flitting about in the dusk, folding all their animals, or picking the fruit, which was all ripening at once from the great heat; but the old woman was glad to have a bit of gossip to lighten her labour, and often accompanied the children's unwilling steps some way up the hill. What a pity it is that little chickens must go to roost some time in the evening, though the outdoor world will look so pleasant then, pleasanter than it has been all day!

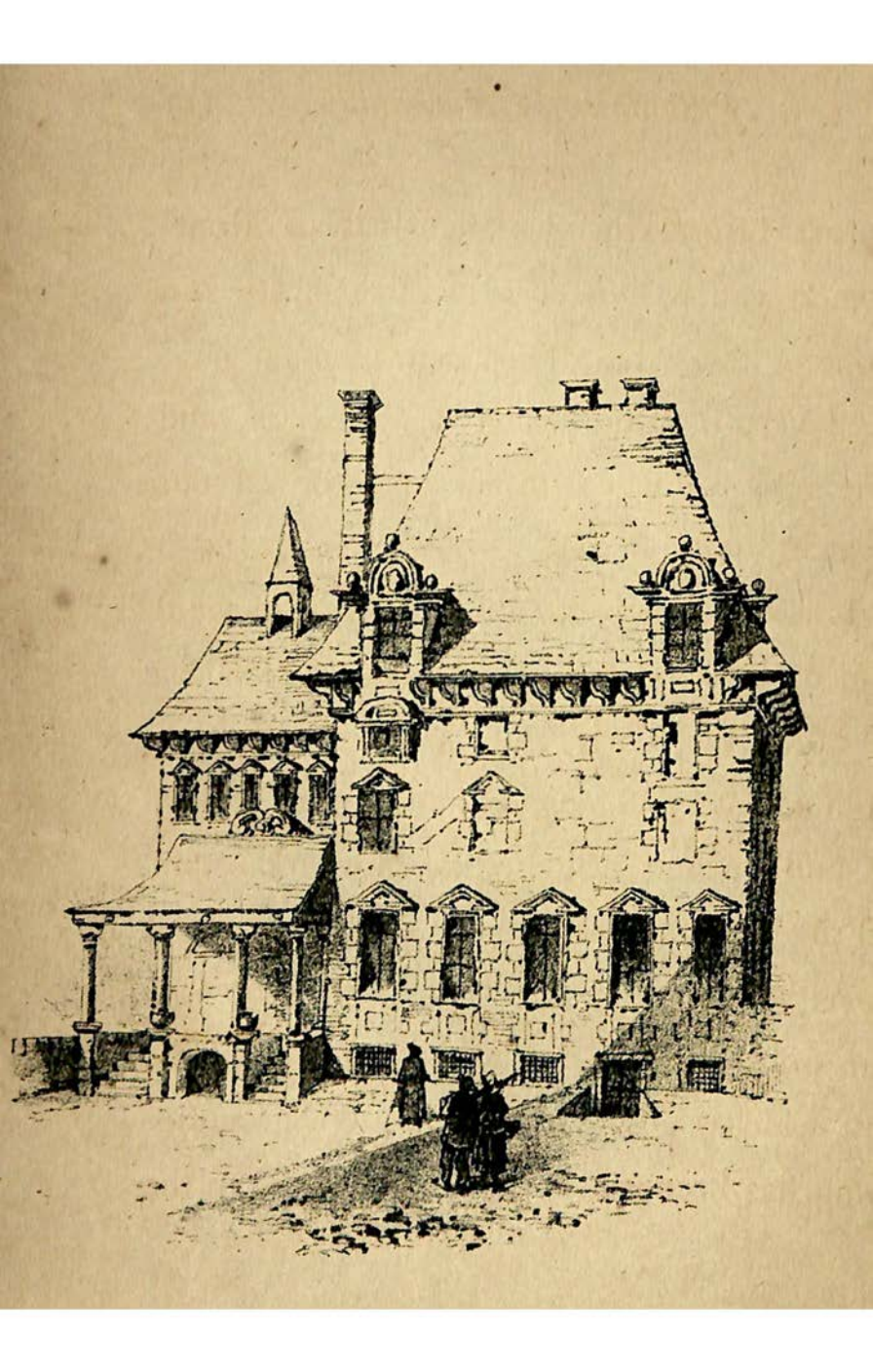
During the summer one day, rather cooler

than the others, was chosen to go and see the "Château Montgomeri," about ten miles off. For this journey they had to be all packed into a sort of waggonette, called "*le break*" by Madame Turgot, the proprietor, who drove it herself, resplendent in a stiffly-starched cap.

The break was so high, and the apple-tree boughs in the orchard so low, that to save them from Absalom's fate, it had to be loaded with its heap of children outside the gate, much to the amusement of M. le Curé. Their way lay along one of the prettiest roads hereabouts, all bordered with acacia-trees, with their lovely white blossom sweetening all the air. It grows here just like our May or hawthorn, and is one of the great

beauties of the hedgerows in summer. They passed the strong red brick château and model farm belonging to the "*Marquis de Chocolat*," as he is called there, from having made all his money by a chocolate manufactory. Then came a village, and an old church with a very curious porch, with columns and carved figures all round it.

At the entrance of this village there was also a very beautifully carved stone cross, standing out against the sky on a little rising ground. This was the only pretty cross they had yet seen, as most of them are quite plain, or else very painful to look at, being actual wooden crucifixes painted black, with the figure the size and colour of life.



Just before reaching the Château Montgomeri you pass over a river which flows in front of the gate. This château must have been very beautiful when it was whole, and originally belonged to an ancestor of our Scotch Montgomerys.

It is melancholy to look at now, so defaced and destroyed. It is built in what I believe is called the Early French style, with very high and very sloping roof, and every variety of mullion and carving like lacework round all the windows and doors. A flight of stone steps with a balustrade lead up to what was the front door, in the middle of the house, but which is now at the end, as one entire wing has been pulled down; for owing to the

French custom of dividing property, it was at one time left to two brothers, one of whom pulled down his half, and with the stones built a more modern house a little way off.

Inside there is a fine staircase of stone, of which half the balustrades are gone. On the first floor is the dining-room, now used as a kitchen, its chimneypiece of carved wood, and above it a picture of some Montgomeri of ancient times looking on (or perhaps assisting) at the burning of a town.

The only creature living here now is an old woman, who takes care of it for the owner, who lives somewhere in Burgundy, and only comes here once a year for a few days, and for whom she keeps in order a bed-room and sit-

ting-room fitted up with all the remnants of former grandeur, which seem still to her so magnificent,—the old mirrors, the bed with faded satin curtains, the tapestry chairs with tarnished gilding, and old ricketty consoles. The furnished part looked almost sadder than the other many empty rooms, which echoed the children's voices, as they ran through them, startling the rats away.

The old woman, like the spiders, had spread her various industries into every hole and corner: in one room there were bunches of flax and hanks of yarn; in another, apples laid on the floor; and in another she washed and dried her clothes.

In the basement storey, approached from

the outside, rather like the area of a London house, were the dungeons, now tenanted by cows and calves, who were tied to the rings to which, I suppose, the old Montgomeris tied their prisoners. The blackest dungeon of all was awarded to the barrels of cider, which could be seen through the barred windows! The courtyard was trampled by cattle and overgrown with grass; a man was beating some walnut-trees in one corner, and the walnuts were lying in heaps waiting to be taken up to one of the best bed-chambers! The pigstye was also built in the Early French style, with walls of carved stone from the old house. There is one thing which strikes one very much in all these old places as being so

different from England: one never sees any ivy growing on any of the ruins or old churches or houses. Whether it is that the people have a prejudice against it and pick it all away, or that the climate is too dry for it, I don't know; but one misses it very much.

On the river bank outside the broken-down gate were some men at a fire, making tires for wheels, and cooling them in the river in a most primitive manner.

The old woman was very talkative and pleased to have visitors, and insisted on the children having the tea they had brought with them in her vaulted kitchen, even producing with great pride a black tea-pot and an old silver tea-spoon; I suppose reserved

for the master on his annual visit. I should hardly think that this château can be old enough to have belonged to the Montgomeri who killed Henry II. of France, in 1559; but they are all of the same family. The little sleepy town of Ducey at the back of the château is very picturesque with its bridge and river.

CHAPTER VII.

POLITICAL EVENTS—THE WAR—DEPARTURE OF FRANÇOIS.

HITHERTO this summer had been very quiet and uneventful (as you may have remarked) both to the children and every one. Certainly there had been a little fuss in the town at the time of the *Plébiscite*, on the 8th May, which was on a Sunday, and every one went up to vote after chapel; but it passed over very quietly, most of the townspeople, though inclined to be Republican, voting "yes," or remaining neutral, rather

with the idea that even if they did say "no," it would have very little effect.

Poulain, the draper in the main street, a most polished individual in carpet slippers, who sold "*confections de Paris*" and every sort of thing besides, made no secret of his own Republican tendencies, but was very liberal on the subject, showing handkerchiefs embroidered with *fleur de lis*, and saying he had had a visit from the sergeant of police about them, but that he had told him they were bees, or violets, which appeared to have quite satisfied the credulous sergeant, as they were allowed to remain in the window.

However, from this month of July events, public and private, crowded one after another.

First of all, and most important to our children, their father had to go to England on business, which business ended in its being settled that they were all to leave France early in September, instead of remaining two or three years, as originally intended. During his absence came the rumour of the Emperor having protested against the German Prince Hohenzollern being made King of Spain. This made very little impression in a place so remote from railways, and where news is received very slowly, there being only one tiny weekly paper, generally full of local news, and if anything chances to happen on a Monday, nothing is heard of it till the following Sunday. So they were all thinking of the

crops, and whether the fruit harvest would be good, lamenting over the smallness of the apples, and rejoicing that fish was so cheap, when the news of the insult to the French envoy, and the declaration of war, came upon them at once like a clap of thunder.

There was a long article of twenty lines in the little newspaper, enlarging on this insult to France, and telling the people how they must wish to resent it; and at first they did seem all to be rather pleased at the idea of punishing the Prussians for their behaviour, and the Emperor was taken into favour for the time being.

The bookseller displayed in his shop maps of the seat of war, showing the whole of

Germany and merely the frontier of France. M. Beaume, the "*friseur*," who came down from the town to cut Grey Eyes' hair, was quite excited, and nearly snipped a piece off his ear, while describing the departure of "*Notre Empereur, à Berlin, c'est le mot!*"

When the children's father returned from England with English newspapers and ideas, actually deeming it possible that it might be a long and terrible struggle, he was very much pooh-poohed, and considered to have been contaminated by reading "*Le Times*," to which paper was attributed all the English lukewarmness in the French cause.

The few soldiers on leave who now rejoined the army went off with immense enthusiasm.

M. Poulain was especially martial: he assured "*Monsieur et Madame*" that he should be little longer able to have the pleasure of serving them; that the shop must be left to women; that he had a brother a captain in the Line, and he himself who was speaking also must fly to punish the enemy; and hinted at the Rhine frontier as the only possible end to the war.

The victory of Saarbrück was made a great deal of, and the "*baptème de feu*" of poor little Louis.

The succeeding battles of Wissembourg and Woerth were very much suppressed, it being merely mentioned in the meagre telegrams posted up at the *Mairie*, that the

French force, under Marshal McMahon, had received a check; and they claimed Vionville as a victory, and rather ignored the disastrous battles of Forbach and Gravelotte, making out that the Prussians had suffered quite as much, and were much afraid of the mitrailleuses.

The newspaper was very full of admiration of Marshal McMahon, who was voted to be a very great hero; he was described as fighting in front of his men, "*le chassepôt sur l'épaule*," and a subscription was opened to present him with a sword of honour—to replace the chassepôt, I suppose.

The commonest form of telegram at that time was merely "*tout va bien*," and detailing the positions of the army, which, to any

one at all acquainted with the map, plainly showed that things were not going on at all well.

The accounts in the English papers received at Maison Bosquet were regarded as prejudiced; but still at last there came an uneasy feeling that they were being kept in the dark, for the washerwoman came once or twice to borrow the newspapers, saying there was a person who could translate it to them; and Mademoiselle Hermon, the bakeress's pretty neat daughter, who came down every morning with her bag of bread, white cap, parasol, and clever poodle dog called Toto, used to linger in the kitchen, to try and gather any scraps of news, good or bad.

The war affected the comfort of the household in a small way, for the servants were very much excited, though they had no relations engaged. The dinner was often late; indeed, one evening it was stolen from before the fire by a thievish brown dog called Flora (belonging to the nearest English family), who took advantage of Angélique stepping round to gossip about the terrible events with the curé's housekeeper next door.

Another night both servants rushed into the drawing-room, declaring that the town must have been taken by the Prussians, as the *tocsin* was sounding, the great bell which is only rung when some terrible misfortune has happened. They both set off full speed

to see what was the matter. The terrible misfortune turned out to be the burning of an empty mill; but I suppose all our minds were full of forebodings, for the *tocsin* did sound very awful clanging through the night air.

The town crier had harder work now, and was hoarse with calling out all the names and classes for the Conscription, and the people's faces grew sadder and sadder as these were repeated day by day, and a son or husband or brother went away. Some had lost relations in the previous battles, and there were continual Masses being said for their souls in all the chapels. It was said that the old barrack was to be got ready for an hospital, and that

even the "*Lycée*," or boy's school, would be required for the wounded soldiers.

Towards the end of August there was the lull, while the French army was retreating and getting hemmed in near Sedan; but even then no one seemed to know exactly where it was, or anything about its position. It was at this time that poor François, M. Lemaître's servant, was taken. He had expected his summons for some time, as he had been a sailor for ten years, and therefore too valuable to be left long; but it was not the less a shock to all when Angélique burst in one morning to say that François's number had been called, and that he was off to Brest next day, and had come to say good bye "*son fusil*

sur l'épaule." This was a dramatic rendering of Angélique's, leading one to suppose that he had come in full martial attire, whereas the gun was merely the old rusty blunderbuss with which he had been in the habit of peacefully murdering the sparrows in the garden; but it was too true that he was going, and with his ardour rather damped by a very clear knowledge of what war really was. Grey Eyes embraced him fondly, and lamented much after his friend, whose place was empty for a long time.

It was then it was first discovered that Nanon was not an old spinster, but had a husband, who was farm servant some distance off, and there was a rumour that he was to

come instead of François to the farm; but nothing came of it: the husband, perhaps, even preferring the battles of his country to domestic life with Nanon. She was very full of wrath against the Prussians, probably from their being the cause of François going and leaving her all the work to do. She muttered fearful sounding threats against "*Ces scélérats de Prussiens!*" wielding her mallet as if she wished to make them feel the weight of it: in Paris she would certainly have become a "*Pétroleuse.*"

Bismarck was the peculiar enemy whom they all detested: the small boys went about roaring the "Marseillaise" and scoring all the walls and trees with "*à bas Bismarck!*"

The servants taught Grey Eyes to call this out amidst great applause. Every stranger coming to the town was looked upon with suspicion as a possible spy, and the children's father, who had light hair, and altogether rather a German appearance, was actually pounced upon one day while sketching the old walls, and was only allowed his liberty on referring for his character as a resident to M. Lemaître, his landlord.

CHAPTER VIII.

MONT ST. MICHEL.

DURING this month the elder ones of the family went to see Mont St. Michel, unkindly leaving all the children at home, as it was voted to be too hot and too long an undertaking for them; but though they did not go, you shall hear about it, in case you ever go there yourselves.

There are two ways of going there from where we were. One is by water, the whole way in a boat; but to do this it is necessary

to calculate very accurately the time and height of the tide, or else you may chance to find yourself stuck in the sand waiting for the next tide, or you may have to sleep at the Mont St. Michel inn, for want of a conveyance to take you away; and, though one might sleep in a worse place, still, with an anxious family expecting one at home, and primed with fears of quicksands, it would not be pleasant.

The other way was by carriage, and involves a very long round, as there is only the one bridge over the river which has to be crossed, but there are no risks, and we chose this safer way. We went in an "*Américaine*," a kind of light carriage, with two seats in front and

two behind, and with a hood, which could be put up in case of rain.

The road at first was dull and uninteresting, along the upper bank of the river. A wooded country loses so much of its beauty in dead summer, when the trees are all one dense green, without any of the varying shades so pretty in spring or autumn.

We passed many farmhouses, and in the garden of one of them we had the good fortune to see a woman wearing one of the real old Norman caps, which, strange to say, we had never yet seen, as in our little town they have completely gone out in favour of a close cap, in shape rather like the calico sun-bonnet worn by our English country people,

and the *bonnes* and the younger women generally wear a cap of a *Fanchon* shape, trimmed with frills, and tied behind with long gay streamers, which is very becoming, and a Paris innovation, I think.

But in this remote corner we found the real thing, rising a foot from the head, stiffened with starch and wire, not becoming, but certainly imposing. I don't wonder at its having gone out of fashion, for it must take hours to erect it into proper stiffness. The Brittany caps which we had seen at St. Malo were not near so high, and had larger wings at the side.

Towards the sea the country got bleak and bare-looking, and after passing a quaint little

village, we came out on the dusty shore road. Large bushes of feathery tamarisk, with its pink and white flowers, formed quite a hedge on one side, growing out of the grey sand. We were glad to catch sight of our rock looming in the distance, though we could see that we were rather too soon, as the water had not yet reached it.

We stopped at the nearest point of shore, where there is a broken-down village, seeming only to exist for the horses and carriages of tourists, and looking quite deserted.

Unfortunately for us, it had one inhabitant at least, who sprang out upon us with bare legs and tattered clothes, announcing himself as the guide without whom we should inevit-

ably be lost, and not see anything of the wonders of the place.

He goes by the name of "*le géant*," as he is very tall, and he is certainly the guide to every one, as he insists on accompanying them whether they like it or not.

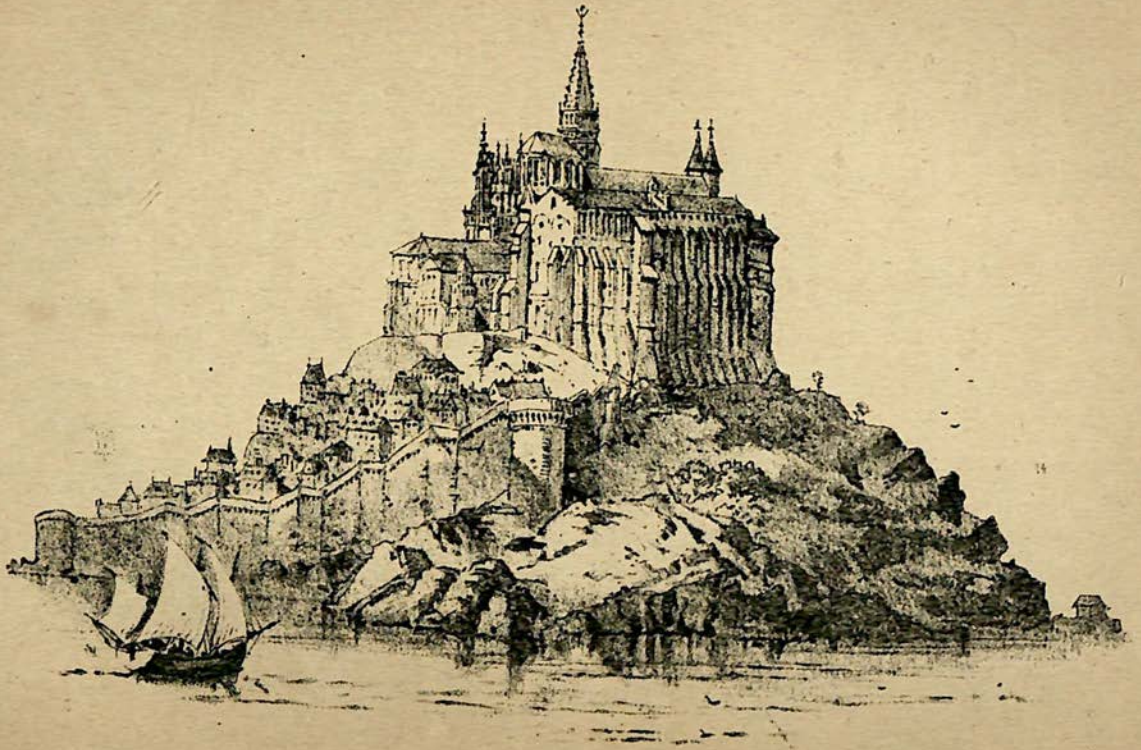
We engaged a boat and a couple of rowers at the pier, and were quite ready to proceed without our guide, but he would not be left behind, and so worked on poor L——'s feelings, by describing his grief at his son having been drawn for the army, and having to go away that very night, that on leaving the boat she bestowed on him two francs, which had one good effect, as he disappeared quickly in search of a cabaret to spend

them in, and we saw him no more for the present.

Picking our way along the slippery landing-place under the wall, among heaps of fishing-nets and loose stones, we turned in at an old archway, near which are two innocent-looking cannon, taken from the English in 1423. A second archway is the beginning of the steep crooked little street in which is the one inn of the place. This arch is inhabited, as a head or two appeared to stare at us from the narrow slits of windows. Perilous little stairs and plank bridges lead from the houses to the battlemented walls; little patches of garden on different levels, and crabbed old fruit-trees pushing through the stones. Before begin-

ning the grand ascent to the abbey, we climbed one of the flights of crumbling steps to the top of the wall. Looking down from the top you could hardly distinguish the wall from the grey rock, both decorated with tufts of wild pinks, growing in the crevices and waving in the wind; but it all looks as if the tide of life had receded away from it, and left it there deserted and solitary. Many of the houses are empty and shut up or falling into ruins. The stony ascent, which can hardly be called a road, winds round till it comes to the door of the abbey or castle.

Since the Revolution it has been used as a common prison; but a few years ago the Emperor gave it over to the Bishop of



Coutances, who has had it all repaired, and it is now taken care of by some of the Christian brotherhood, who educate a few orphans there.

In the doorway was stuck up a printed notice, offering the protection of St. Michael to any household wishing for it: it was done by the year, I think, and sounded very cheap.

In the entrance hall we paid some small sum, and were taken charge of by a Christian brother, who was to show us everything; and he certainly did, for we were nearly four hours going over it all. To be sure, we saw the work of seven centuries! All the older portion was hollowed out of the actual rock

by the old Benedictine monks, who lived here in the eighth century, before any of the fortress was built.

There is a beautiful Gothic hall, where the Knights of St. Michael kept their banners and shields. This is so strongly built, and in such good preservation, that it seemed as if they might have just left it, and as if Time itself had no effect on what those wise hard-working men of old could do.

We climbed higher and higher, panting and admiring, finding one storey more beautiful than another, through lovely light-looking cloisters open to the sky, till we came out on a gallery with flying buttresses, from whence we could see over bay, sea, and

country. Above this there is now only a square tower, though there used to be a spire, with a gilded statue of the Archangel with a drawn sword in his hand.

It was difficult to make up one's mind to go down, and to think we should most likely never see it again, and we descended, feeling quite ashamed of all the buildings of the present day. There was the wretched little town of fifty years ago, crumbling to pieces at the bottom of the hill, while this glorious building of six hundred years old will outlast us all! So in this dissatisfied state of mind we were marched off by our Christian brother to see the subterranean part and the prisons; not the prisons of the convicts under Napo-

leon III.—they had been lodged in the principal rooms—but the prisons of the good old times, dark, dank, and unwholesome cells, with no windows, and barred doors.

One rather larger than the rest, and with a hole in the top admitting a gleam of light, had been with true French politeness put aside for "*les dames*," as our guide told us. We were glad to escape from them, and to breathe the outer air at a gap in the wall, with a precipice beneath, and to refresh our minds by looking at the large wheel, or kind of treadmill, by which the modern prisoners had raised their provisions from below.

It did not seem at all a cruelty after the sight of those rat-holes in which human crea-

tures had actually spent years of life; and we went down, considerably more inclined to think favourably of our own times than when we had seen only the lovely architecture of the castle.

On the same level with these dungeons there is the old vault or burying-place of the monks, and, one storey higher, the church, which is bare and modernized, all the ornaments and carving having been destroyed at the time of the Revolution. It is supported underneath by an curious dark crypt with enormously strong stout pillars.

Before leaving, we spent some money for the benefit of the orphans, at a counter laid out with photographs, rosaries, and carved

ivory toys to be bought as remembrances. Here we chose penholders for the servants, and baby house-lamps for the children, with beads for globes, and in each was a tiny miniature photograph of the Mount. These ivory and bone toys used to be considered the work of the prisoners, but as they remained and the prisoners are gone, I fancy they must all come from the various convents round about. Besides, there are all the shells and pebbles in boxes, and ornaments like what one sees at the Isle of Wight and at the Lakes, and which I know strong-minded people object to buying.

But I counsel you children always to buy and be foolish. It don't signify whether the

things bought have any real relation to the place or not.

I have now on my writing-table a mother-of-pearl shell, given to me at Mont St. Michel, and though I know quite well that it never grew on any northern shore, and that its real home must have been some tropical coral reef, yet now when I look at it, I think of a misty blue sky and sea, a white line of foam marking the receding tide, and a strip of grey sand all framed into a little picture by the carved window above the Christian brother's head.

Having finished our purchases, we bid good bye to St. Michael's beautiful home, and began our perilous descent down to our inn. We were so tired when we got there that we

could hardly climb the six steps to the front bed-room, where our dinner was laid, the real dining-room being almost in the kitchen, and smelling strongly of garlic.

In other years we might not have been so tenderly treated, but this year we were of importance,—the one swallow who made the summer; the first, and probably the last, foreign tourists: the echoes of war had come even here.

Our bed-room was cool and pleasant: it was adorned with pictures of the Archangel Michael and the Emperor Napoleon. While we rested and ate we made fanciful plans, all doomed to come to nought, of coming here again, and staying a few days, and having

sea bathing. The beds looked clean and white, and what more can one want?

Having still some little time before the road across the sand was dry and firm enough to let our carriage drive over for us, we sauntered down the street and looked into the one or two little shops: one of curiosities rivalling the Christian brother's counter, and kept by an old growling man, who poured forth many complaints of the bad times, and how the Emperor had ruined the place, by giving up the castle to the Bishop of Coutances, and taking away the soldiers and prisoners, who made some trade, and consumed more in a week than these *Frères Chrètiens* did in a year. He was very con-

temptuous of the brotherhood altogether, saying they were neither priests nor laymen.

Leaving our old grumbler, we walked round to the other side of the island, where there are only rocks and trees, and where our sea baths were to be taken in the future, and here we could first catch sight of little Tombéléne, the companion rock, who seemed very insignificant, with only an old tumble-down ruin upon it.

On turning back, we were so tantalized by the sight of the tufts of wild pinks growing in the most inaccessible places, that we bribed a little weather-beaten urchin, by the promise of two sous, to clamber up the rocks and get us some.

How sweet they were! and so pretty with their pale crimson flowers and bluish grass-like leaves; but one could hardly believe them to be the original of all our many-coloured pinks, picotees, and carnations; as unlike as our English people, with all their arts, trades, and manufactures, are to the original Norman here, who does nothing but fish and make shell baskets.

I am not quite sure that the development has been such a very happy one in either case, for it must be pleasanter to grow here in a nook in the grey rock, overlooking the sea and watered by the salt spray, than planted in a garden, with each blossom tied to a separate stick, and surrounded, besides, with a

stiff circle of cardboard for fear of bursting, and I am sure a London alderman would look neither active nor graceful beside one of these hardy fishermen of Mont St. Michel.

Nevertheless, sous appear to be few and far between here, for we were very soon besieged by a little army of boys, each bearing a nosegay of pinks, to be exchanged forthwith for sous.

We found our carriage waiting at the inn, and hearing our friend the Giant very uproarious next door, having evidently spent his two francs on apple brandy, we endeavoured to mount as quickly and quietly as possible, so as to avoid being guided back by him.

We thought we were successful, but just as we had cleared the stony street and had got on to the sand, we heard him scampering and halloaing after us, demanding more money, and that we should take him up. Luckily, we had a good start and got away, but we heard his loud curses for a long time in the distance.

The charms of apple brandy had been also too much for the driver, who drove us home very unsteadily, inclining either to the wall on one side or the ditch on the other; but as the horse had gone the same expedition steadily for years, we arrived quite safe at home, feeling that Mont St. Michel was well worth all the fatigue and trouble. For the

honour of France, it must be recorded that *le géant* and this driver were the only two drunken men we saw during the whole of our stay in the country.

CHAPTER IX.

PICNIC AT THORN FERRY—PROCLAMATION OF THE REPUBLIC—FAREWELL TO MAISON BOSQUET.

THE children at Maison Bosquet, requiring to be consoled for not having gone to Mont St. Michel, were to be taken to celebrate a birthday, to a little village on the *Grève*, called Gué de l'Epine. It is at the end of the kind of peninsula made by the two rivers running into the bay. It was about the time of the high tides, and they were to see the "bore," or great tidal wave; they were also to have the delight of making

a fire on the sand, and boiling their own kettle to make tea.

The village itself is very primitive; of course there is an *auberge*, or pot-house, with its bunch of mistletoe; but with that exception, it is a collection of fishermen's cottages, built just above the sands, but with their little gardens well wedged up with stones to resist the tides.

There was a ferry-boat at the river, which flows out in the sand, some little distance from the shore. They did not seem to use boats for fishing, for the rise and fall of the tide is so great on this coast, that they lay their nets and take them in at low tide. When the children got there, the tide was

completely out, and the *Grève* looked a plain of sand, Mont St. Michel seeming so close as if they could easily have walked over there. I believe the country people do walk over very often; but it is very dangerous, even if they know the coast, as, if a fog comes on suddenly, they may get into the quicksands near the mouths of the two rivers. This plain of sand is said to have been once an enormous forest, and if you dig deep enough you may find remains of trees in the sand. There were children far out in the distance gathering cockles, and the men were setting their nets; they were all in high glee, for "*la grande marée*" brings in all the shoals of fish, and they expected it to be very high to-night.

Our children were actually allowed to imitate the little cockle-pickers, to their great delight, and take off their shoes and stockings, and run about barefoot on the soft muddy sand, only being warned to keep clear of the beautiful sea anemones, which were to be seen in every little pool.

You must, however, be brought up to a trade to like it, I think, for their cockle picking ended in their cutting their feet with the bits of razor-shell, and they were rather glad to resume their despised shoes and stockings, and to begin picking up wood for the fire. This required a good deal of perseverance, as the inhabitants keep a good look-out for any driftwood which may be thrown up; but

they did at last collect enough to make a fine fire.

What delight there is in a fire out of doors! the smoke blew into their eyes; the water did not quite manage to boil, though there had been an English tea-kettle brought on purpose; the tea tasted of wood-smoke; but still it was all charming; and they finished up with some greengages which the good-natured driver discovered in a garden close by, and which the owner wished very much to sell, as they were ripening all at once. The provision basket was filled with them, and even the tea-kettle, when empty, so as to take them home, as there were too many to eat at once; but it was no use to think of making them into jam

to take away, for an order had come out that no provisions of any kind were to leave the country, and a great many English had had to leave all their stores of jams. While the children were at tea they had forgotten to watch for the tide, which was very far out when they sat down; and now, when they looked up again, the whole sand was covered, and they only knew where the river had been by the ferry-boat rocking at its stake.

The immense wave was rolling up inland faster than they could run along the narrower part of the river; the last of the little cockle-pickers had to run hard to escape it.

It was quite evening before they could make up their minds to set off home, for the

setting sun looked so splendid behind Mont St. Michel, with the ample sea all dashing about it, and the water came up almost to the gnarled roots of the trees under which they were sitting.

The journey home was not as prosperous as the day had been, for the horse turned restive, and kicked, and behaved in such a manner that he had to be sent back to the town and a quieter animal sent instead.

After a day's pleasuring, one feels aggrieved at being left to walk home along a bad road composed of deep sandy ruts, with only the choice of sitting by the roadside for an hour; still, there is always a pleasure to children in being up and out at unusual hours, and they

occupied themselves star-gazing till they were picked up and taken home.

They were sorry to think they were driving along for the last time, as the next week was to be devoted to packing up and going away.

I think this last expedition was on the 3rd of September, and on the morning of the 4th, Angélique came back from early Mass with the intelligence of the surrender of the Emperor Napoleon, with all his army, at Sedan. He was prayed for at the English church that morning as "Napoleon the Third, now a prisoner in the hands of his enemies;" but that was the only prayer he got, for every one, high and low, united in abusing him as having betrayed and sold them: they had a kind

of satisfaction in finding some one to abuse for everything bad that had happened. The town that morning was in great commotion; there was always a knot of people at the *Mairie*, gazing at the few lines of the telegram posted up, as if they could make it say more than the tremendous truth.

That evening some of M. Vinoy's, the chemist's, drugs being required at Maison Bosquet, the children's father went up to the town to fetch them, and as he waited in the chemist's shop, Mme. Vinoy came in and announced that "*la Republique*" had been proclaimed—"*cette bête noire*" that every one was so afraid of. The telegram from Paris had come in, telling of the Republic there, and

our little town would not be outdone, and forthwith proclaimed its own little Republic on the spot; but having done so, and carefully pulled down all the Imperial signs and eagles wherever they found them, they went quietly to bed, and there was no further disturbance. Some of the English families resident in the town had gone away before this, as the news of the war got worse, but nearly all the rest took alarm at the Republic, and there was a regular flight the day or two after; all the *diligences* being so full that it was impossible to get a seat; and they found the packets from St. Malo and Cherbourg crowded with all the English flocking from the various towns on the Norman coast. The little church in the

barrack, usually so crammed with families of light-haired children, was almost empty by the last Sunday. The townspeople were in despair at this exodus, and the Sous-Préfet had an address printed and posted up on all the walls, entreating "*la colonie Anglaise*" to remain with them, and not to be afraid, for that the cause of law and order would always be maintained whatever form of government was instituted. This appeal had not, however, much effect, and in less than a week after the Sous-Préfet himself had departed, being replaced by one of a more Republican tendency.

Our family were to go back to England by St. Lo and Cherbourg, but hearing reports

that the railway there was so blocked with soldiers, ammunition, and provisions going up to Paris, that all the trains were hours behind their time, they determined to sleep at St. Lo, in order to have the whole of the next day to get to Cherbourg in time for the night packet. They were to drive to St. Lo, and there take the railway for Cherbourg. There were a few commissions to be done in the town before leaving, so they walked up there the morning after all these wonderful events.

They had to go and get carnation plants to take home from Pinel, whose garden, looking like a field of carnations of every colour, stretches down the hill near the convent; they had also to get Breton and Norman

crosses for presents, and they had to pay a last visit to Poulain the draper, whom they found in a state of abject depression, very different from his former braggadocio disposition; for recruiting had gone on so fast that now none were left to be taken but the tradespeople, and his number was fast approaching. He could take no pleasure in his wares; in the midst of displaying his ribbons he would hear the tone of the hateful drummer at the top of the street, and would fly out, carpet slippers and all, to listen to the numbers cried out. His enthusiasm was gone: he acknowledged that he could not shoot, and appealed to Madame whether it would be any good taking him for a soldier; and indeed he did

not seem to be of the stuff of which one would wish one's army composed, with an invader at the doors.

There was, however, plenty of enthusiasm among the young recruits of the Garde Mobile, who had come in from the country to be drilled by an old sailor and a Zouave who had been sent down for the purpose. There were nearly two thousand of them, billeted about in all the houses; but though there were so many, they were all well behaved and orderly, never to be seen tipsy, and so polite if one met them in the streets. They were most of them mere lads from the villages round about—fair-haired, blue eyed, and having evidently some of them never seen a town before;

when not drilling they were staring in at the shop windows in open-mouthed admiration, or else walking in rows, singing "*Mourir pour la Patrie.*"

Poor boys! the words of that song proved a bitter truth for most of them, shot down within the walls of Paris, far away from the green fields and orchards of their sunny Normandy. The little town was full of bustle while they stayed, but they were soon marched off to join the rest of the Norman regiment at St. Lo.

The day of departure came also for our family. There is a proverb which says that "a rolling stone gathers no moss;" but my experience is that it gathers a great deal too

much for its own comfort in travelling! In the few months our children had been here, they had managed to collect as extras,—an aunt, a cousin, a French *bonne*, who actually volunteered to go to England with them, a hamper of plants, various packages of china and earthenware, and a long hairy French trunk, whose mission was to relieve the over-charged original boxes.

Old Mère Vachon, with little Marie, had come up early on the last morning, leaving her farm to look to itself, and remained in the kitchen to see them off, mourning their departure, and giving vent to all her grief at the war, and at the Emperor being gone, whom she thought had done very well by

the country. She took a very low view of the power of the Republic, and did not see what was to prevent the Prussians coming into Normandy and harrying all the country; she remembered they had done it in the First Napoleon's time, and why not now? She and Marie came in for various keepsakes of things and toys which could not be packed up,—particularly a large green pitcher and stand, which will, doubtless, be preserved in the farm cupboard for generations to come.

M. Lemaître had been down already, had been settled with, and had been made very happy by obtaining the remainder of the precious ton of coal and some garden tools at a nominal price; he had carefully locked them

up in the coach-house, for fear of accidents, before he said his "*petit bonjour*" to his departing tenants.

Two private conveyances had been hired for the journey to Dol—one a small omnibus, and the other a kind of *diligence*, with an enormous hood over the front seat.

There was a melancholy group collected to see the departure; Mère Vachon, Marie, the daughter-in-law, bending under her yoke and pails, who had come for the last instalment of pig-wash, besides the relations of the *bonne* who was going away, the cook, Angélique's mother, and a cousin, who had come to escort her home. Nanon even stopped in her cider making, leaving her heaps of rotting apples,

from whence with unwonted generosity she selected one for each child as a parting gift. "*Tiens! j'allons vous donner chaque une.*" Poor Batou, at the full extent of his chain, was gazing his last at his friends, his eyes wistful with memories of Sunday dinners, as the *cortège* drove away from the pleasant little summer home, and Maison Bosquet, after having been for six months filled with life, noise, and children, was left to its former solitude.

"On the topmost orchard branches
It then was crimson and snow,
Where now the red-gold apples
Burn on the turf below."

CHAPTER X.

JOURNEY TO ST. LO AND CHERBOURG—THE HOME IN SCOTLAND.

THE poor little town looked dull and altered as they drove through, many houses shut up, and sad, anxious faces to be seen at every turn. The road to St. Lo was one they had never been on before, and very soon they lost sight of the town, though Mont St. Michel appeared and re-appeared three times before he finally sank down to be seen no more, when they felt as if bidding farewell to an old friend.

They could hardly believe that the journey was nearly twice as long as the memorable one from Dol when they arrived, it was so much pleasanter. There were three seats in front of one carriage under the great hood, which were very airy and comfortable, though without much view of the country; then they had their dinner, just as children always like it, in a scrambling way on their knees, with only two glasses and a few knives and forks for the whole party; they could get out and walk up all the hills, for there was no hurry, as they had the whole day to get to St. Lo.

They passed the little village of Percy, and the town of Villedieu, where they actually saw a railway again.

The country people were all busy gathering their apples and making cider; the whole air smelt heavy of apples; there were but few men, except old ones or mere boys, to be seen, all having gone off to the war, and the women were doing most of the work.

Late in the evening they arrived at the "*Soleil Levant.*" Luckily, rooms had been engaged beforehand, or it might have been difficult to get them, for the inn was full of Garde Mobile officers; indeed, one of them had only just left the room the children were given, and had to come back for his boots. At the *table d'hôte* the people were gloomy as to the state of affairs, having at last got it into their heads that the German army was

marching fast upon Paris, with no French army to stop them. The morning train from Paris had not yet arrived, and did not come in till the middle of the night, when the whole hotel was roused and wakened by the arrival of some escaping family.

Next morning began all the fuss and bustle of hurrying off to the train, and as our party went along the street, they looked with regret at the two carriages of yesterday, which were proceeding slowly homewards, back to that land of leisure where there are never any trains to catch, and where no one is ever in a hurry.

The railway station was a sight to behold, it was so crowded; and among the crowd was

a poor wounded soldier returning from hospital to join his regiment. He had been wounded at the battle of Woerth. He had such a beaten, dejected look as I hope never to see on any man's face again. The people all looked at him very coldly; the army were not in favour just then.

The train was very late in coming in and in setting off, and at the junction to Bayeux there was another stoppage of two hours. A priest here, seeing Aunt L. was English, came up and asked her to take charge of a letter, and post it in England, for his brother, who was an officer in prison in Prussia.

Cherbourg at last came in sight, with all its strong-looking fortifications. Here the con-

fusion was greater than ever—trains going off one after another with supplies of arms, ammunition, and goods for Paris. It looked a cheerless, dull town; but very likely that impression was given by every one being so melancholy; and when French people do lose their spirits, they lose them completely, and seem to have no heart left.

At the hotel on the quay there was a French family of three children, who had come down from Paris with their mother the night before; the train had been so crowded that all their luggage had been left behind; and they had been the whole night travelling without being able to get even a bit of bread or a glass of water. They were to wait here

till their father sent on their things, and then to go over to England, while he remained in Paris to look after his house and property. The poor lady was very sad, but the children, having been fed and restored, were in wild spirits, careering round the courtyard, and even out into the street, much to the terror of Madelon, their little *bonne* of fourteen.

Our children were very soon marched off down the quay to the steamer, passing the large statue of Napoleon the First, who was obligingly pointing out the way for them; and they remained up on deck till they lost sight of the line of lights marking the town, and the long black outline of the coast of the poor unhappy country they were leaving.

* * * * *

The children's present home is very different from the one they have left; it is in Scotland, on the borders of the black country of Lanarkshire, and not very far from one of the large manufacturing towns. From their beds at night they can see the sky lighted up by the glare of the furnace fires in the distance; and there is a coal-pit so near that on the long winter afternoons they can track the miner boys returning from work, each with his lighted lamp stuck in front of his cap, like little glow-worms in the dusk.

The house is long and low and ivy-covered, and a gurgling "burn," such as you only see

in Scotland, runs at the foot of the garden, where the children pass many damp but happy hours fishing for trout.

Every day the encroachments of furnace, foundry, and coal-pit come nearer and nearer; but this little nook has been hitherto protected from spoliation by having the luck to be almost encircled by the entailed estates of the Marquis of Carabas of the neighbourhood, whose plantations lie across the stream. His rabbits and his pheasants trespass into the garden, the rabbits seeming to prefer the parsley and carrots to be found there to their own wilder vegetables of the wood.

They even went the length of making a nest in the cabbage-bed; but owing to the

excessive petting and attention the young ones received from the children, I think that experiment will hardly be repeated. We have also visits from an occasional bold squirrel, who will venture close up to the windows; and there are moles in abundance, defacing the bank with their humps of clay. Brown Eyes has planted a mole in her garden, but whether with a view to a continuation of the species or not I cannot say. The other live-stock consists of a hive of bees, bees who follow the fashion of the country; and as in this part of Scotland, towards the end of summer, all the townspeople come out to the country, and the country folk go off to "the coast," so the bees are to be sent off on their

travels, and go with other Lowland hives, packed on a cart, up through the pleasant valley of the Clyde, to the moors, there to remain as long as the heather is in bloom. They are weighed before they go and when they come back, to find out if they have made a good use of their time; but I do not know what punishment is inflicted if they are found to have been idle. Our burn runs murmuring away through the fields and meadows of Whitehill Farm, for here, too, we have a farm, though not to compare to the one we have just left, not even boasting the picturesque crowsteps, which we still see on some of the old cottages about here; but there *is* a dog, a contrast to poor Batou, and well

worthy of a place in history: Captain, a colley, and most intelligent of his clever race. He might stand for a model of Burns's dog:—

"He was a gash and faithful tyke
As ever lap a sheugh or dyke;
His honest sonsie baws'nt* face
Ay gat him friends in every place.
His breast was white; his towzie back
Weel clad with coat of glossy black;
His gawsie tail, wi' upward curl,
Hung o'er his hurdies wi' a swirl."

How he enjoys his life, with all its various and bustling avocations! whether officiously hunting the cows into the byre or the sheep into their fold; or accompanying the cart for coals to the pit; or at his more serious occu-

* "Baws'nt," *Anglicé* "with a white spot in his forehead."

pation of scaring the rooks from the newly-sown corn. This talent makes him very valuable in this land of mines and factories, where boys cannot be wasted on bird-scaring. Captain is evidently conscious of its being an honourable employment, for he does it with all his heart, flying round the field, with tail in air, barking himself hoarse, and never leaving off till evening, when the rooks give up business, and fly cawing away to their home in the Carabas plantations.

But the time to visit Captain is on Sunday, when all the pounding, and hammering, and grubbing of the busy week ceases, and is hushed into blessed stillness, and he is left in the house to take charge of everything while

the farm household betake themselves to the kirk, for the two long services and "interval." Then, if the children visit him, Captain rises and comes to the door to welcome them, and returns their salutations graciously but with a serious air, as if he had just left his psalm-book and spectacles on the kitchen table within—a very Elder of a dog—serenely unconscious of his friends the rooks, who are disporting themselves in the field opposite; he even rises superior to his mess of porridge and milk left for him in the corner, at the same time keeping a cautious eye on the cocks and hens, lest they should presume to interfere with it. He feels the weight of responsibility and care sit heavy on his furry

shoulders, and when we leave, only accompanies us to the gate, watching us as we pass away down the lane, picking a stray harebell as we go.

What matter that the skies are grey, or that the harebell may have a smut on its pretty blue head? Captain at least would not change places with Batou.

L'ENVOI.

AND now my story has come to an end, and you will probably hear no more of these children.

It does not seem at all likely that they will ever see that pretty French place again, or if they do, in the course of years, I am afraid they will be disappointed in it, for very few places remain unaltered in this world, or change for the better. If they never see it again, it will remain in their minds as a pleasant picture, for a child's memory, before

it has been dimmed by pain or sorrow, is like the magical glass in the fairy tale, reflecting only what is brightest.

So, when they look back on their French home, they will remember it, not as on the grey days there, when the cold damp fog came rolling in from the sea, blurring the window-panes, and making everything cold and uncomfortable, but as it used to look on summer evenings when, standing on the high point of rock above their "Bear's den," they watched the glowing sunset lighting up Mont St. Michel, making it seem like a gilded castle rising out of a silver sea—they will remember it thus because of that blessed power peculiar to children, which I always fancy

must be one of the reasons why we are told that "Of such is the kingdom of heaven,"—the power of remembering only what is bright, of "marking but the sunny hours," a faculty partaking of heaven in its nature, but more needed in this life than in that life which is to come,—the life where there will be nothing to forget; in "the city which has no need of the sun or of the moon to lighten it;" in "the land which is very far off."

"*Horas non numero, nisi serenas.*"

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